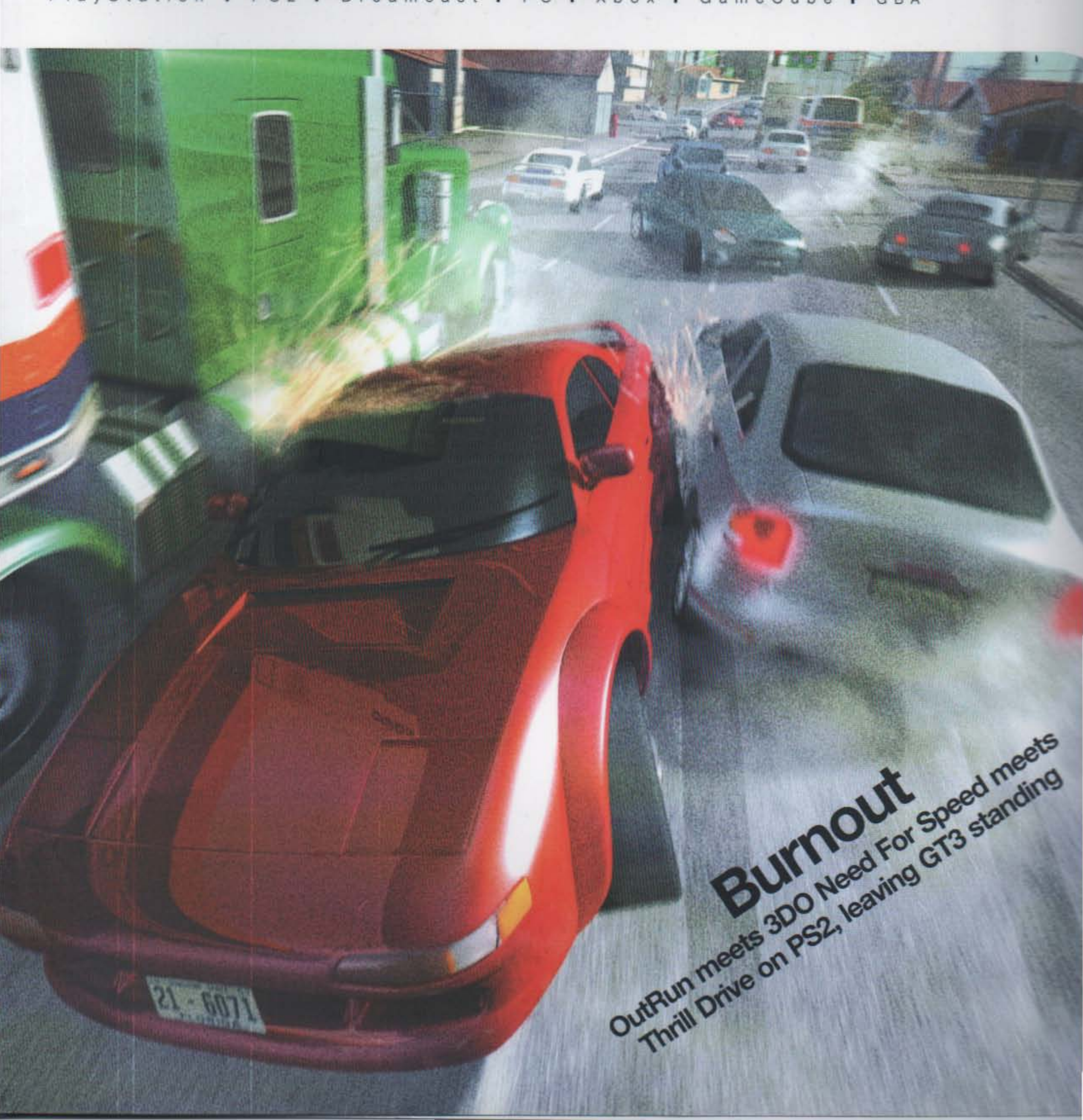
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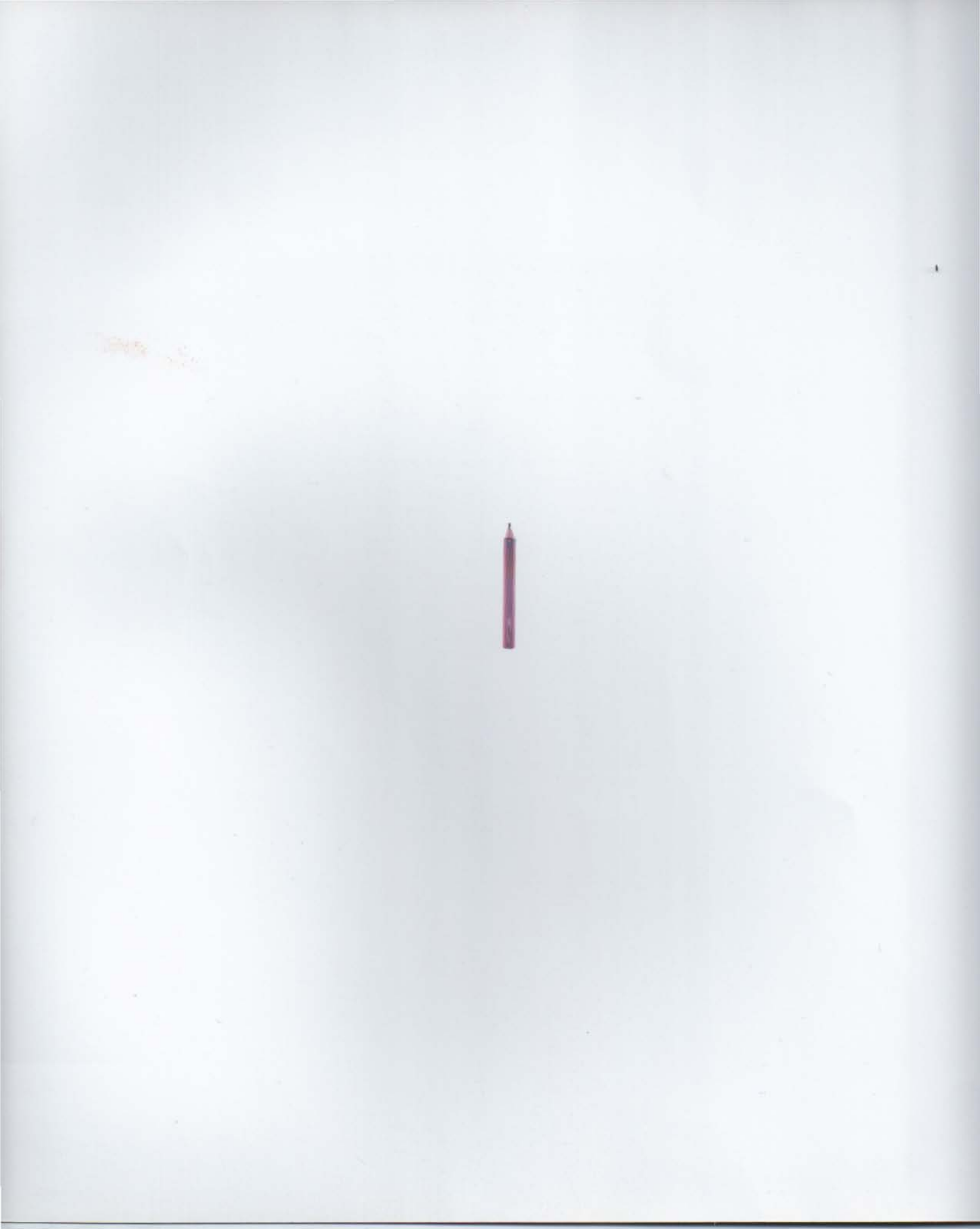
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Inside: Sega's Euro f
Previewed: Parappa 2
Namco's Dead to Rig
Maelstrom, Rayman X
Reviewed: Out Trigg
Twisted Metal Black,
Crisis, Gitaroo Man,
Bedroom coding reviv
DIY game utilities on t







It's difficult to leave many things behind, whether it's an unfinished game of Trivial Pursuit, a cut-short conversation with an industry legend you've been waiting years to meet, or saying goodbye to a magazine you've edited for 41 issues.

I'm doing the latter. In departing, though, I'll be leaving behind a publication which will continue to treat videogaming, a field of entertainment still finding its feet, with the respect it deserves. And it's heartening to see others joining the party – this month's news section illustrates the impact the pastime is having on academia (see p10): it is becoming a sector as worthy of deliberation as cinema or music. In a perverse way, part of me wants to shield our hobby from the sober glare of academics, but my less local-shop-for-local-people side welcomes the interest with open arms.

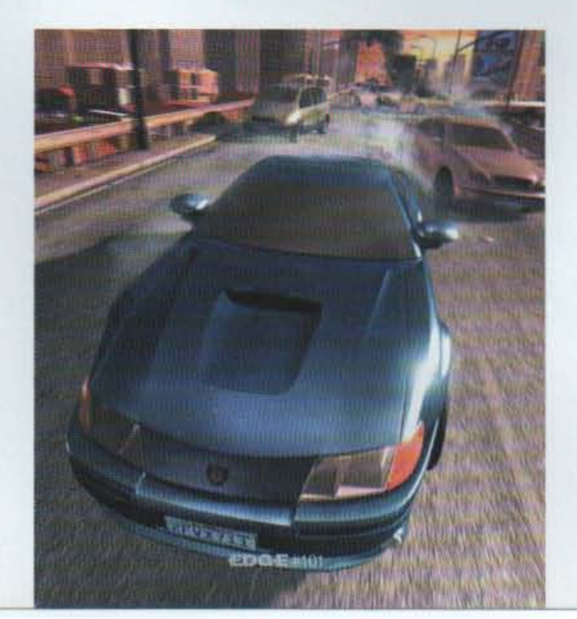
However the medium gains new recognition in the future (and videogames can only attain more cultural significance), **Edge** will continue to exist. This month, driving games are back on the agenda with *Burnout* (see p48). Yes, you've seen them on the covers of **Edge**s past, but the difference here is the approach taken by it developer: in a Frankensteinian manner it is fusing elements from several coin-op classics and a legendary console title in an effort to spin the genre in a 540° doughnut. This is no *Gran Turismo 3*-alike. In some respects it's much more exciting than that.

Also in this issue we look at two recently neglected areas, following the fortunes of once-fashionable startups (p66), and examining the software which can help new talent get their invaluable starts in this industry (p58). If you're currently working to get a break, we'd like to hear about your experiences: drop us a line via edge@futurenet.co.uk.

Anyway, it's time to sign off. If you ever see me at a trade show and want to sit down and talk games, grab me. I may be getting on a bit now, but I'm still the human being who once elected to create an adventure game for his 'O'-level Computer Studies project while fellow students lashed together spreadsheets and book-keeping utilities. (Their work received 'A' grades, while I bagged a 'B'. Typical.)

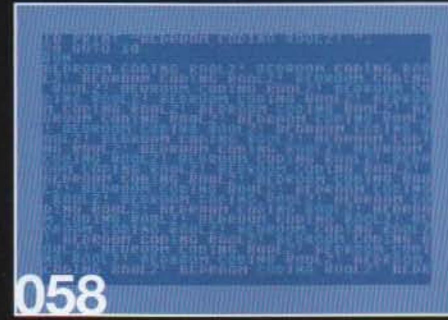
Remember: silicon exists for fun. Have loads of it.

Tony Mott, July 26, 2001



Features




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the end-of-an-era issue



















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"I've walked a white line all my life. I'm not about to screw that up"
"White line's in the middle of the road. That's the worst place to walk"


PLANET HARRIERS
PLANET HARRIERS
AIR TRIX
NAOMI UNIVERSAL CABINET
SEGA
Virtua Fighter 4

Sega soldiers on as new Euro chief arrives

What can be done to save the ailing European coin-op industry? At a recent distributors' meeting Sega Amusements provided some answers

At its headquarters, based in a small industrial unit situated among the rubble-strewn car parks of electronics superstores and derelict office blocks, Sega Amusements recently revealed its latest coin-ops to distributors from all over Europe. Hardly the most sophisticated venue, as sales manager **Brian Marks** concedes: "We used to hold these events in places like Sardinia and Seville, but times are hard in the arcade industry".

From Sardinia to New Malden, Surrey – you don't get a much more poignant metaphor for decline than that. It is a story being told throughout the industry, and all over the world. Consumers have never had so many gadgets vying for their free time (and disposable income). Mobile phones, next-gen consoles, the Internet, cable, satellite, and digital television – it is little wonder the arcade industry is seeing its profits plummet. People aren't even playing coin-ops in pubs any more – none of the large chains, including The Slug and Lettuce, Pitcher and Piano, and All Bar One, favour arcade machines. The industry is being attacked from every angle.

"We used to hold these events in places like Sardinia and Seville – not the Sega Amusements HQ in New Malden, Surrey – but times are hard in the arcade industry"

Sega's cunning plan

But Sega Amusements Europe is fighting back. Recently, the company organised Dream Arena, a focus group event, inviting 60 gamers to play Sega's latest titles and to fill in a questionnaire compiled by development staff in Japan. The machines were also fitted with book-keeping software, checking how long people spent on the games, which characters they liked, and how skilful they were. All this data will then be sent back to Tokyo for analysis. Incredibly, this is a new idea for the coin-op industry: "The arcade business model hasn't changed since *Pong*," points out Marks. "Back then the money was pouring in, but things have changed and the industry has to change, too. Our Dream Arena event was a step in the right direction".

Fortunately, though, Sega Amusements has some excellent games in the pipeline to back up the focus testing. The company's biggest hopes lie with *Beach Spikers*, a beach volleyball sim from AM2. Like the phenomenally successful *Virtua Tennis*, the game faithfully reproduces all the rules and moves of the real sport, and garnishes the dish with beautiful visuals and ultra-smooth animation. The bikini-clad twosomes that make up the various international teams mince about on the sand like catwalk models, while the camera spins around the action in frenzied MTV fashion. The two-button control method is instantly accessible and, as with *Virtua Tennis*, great subtlety can be squeezed from the basic set-up. The lithe players alone should guarantee popularity among some male gamers.

On the subject of *Virtua Tennis*, the sequel was another big hit at the event, and is expected to ape its predecessor's success. The major additions are eight new female players (including Seles, the Williams sisters, and Dokic, but no Kournikova) and a slightly more complex control system. There are still two buttons, but these now control top spin and slice spin (which slows the ball down). Lob is achieved by pressing both together. As usual, Sega is offering a budget package to arcade operators allowing them to upgrade their existing V Tennis machines – it's this kind of low-cost initiative that's currently driving Sega sales in Europe.

Virtua goes on

And the Virtua titles rolled on. *Virtua Golf* from Wow Entertainment is a straightforward sim that offers stroke, match, and skins play. The big innovation for a cabinet from a company the size of Sega is the use of a trackball: when the player rolls the ball back, the golfer pulls the club back, and when the ball is rolled forward, the golfer swings – it's a nice, naturalistic touch (reminiscent of the mouse control in *Virtual Pool*), but it's not quite as accurate as the traditional power meter approach.

Elsewhere, *Virtua Striker 3* from Amusement Vision generated plenty of interest, although the greater gameplay realism that had been promised seemed to be absent. The midfield still resembles some kind of pitched street battle, and strikers still inexplicably turn away from goal when they're clean through. The player models are much more authentic now, though, eschewing the cartoon brightness of *VS1* and *2*, and featuring characteristically believable animation.

Also predictably stunning was Naomi 2 showcase *Virtua Fighter 4*. Boasting arenas of quite breathtaking beauty, tucked into medieval villages, Japanese temples, and sun-kissed beach scenes, the game uses the cut-down three-button interface (punch, kick, guard), but retains the



Wave Runner GP's hydraulic jetski cabinet peps up the title's rather formulaic gameplay, but whether this will be enough to revive interest in the flagging sector is another matter





















Among the titles that Sega has confirmed for European release are (clockwise from top left): *Floigan Brothers* (DC), *Headhunter* (DC/PS2), *Shenmue II* (DC), *Jet Set Radio Future* (Xbox), *Sonic The Hedgehog Advance* (GBA), *Gun Valkyrie* (PS2), *Virtua Fighter 4* (PS2), and the eagerly awaited *Rez*, which is scheduled for both Dreamcast and PlayStation2

subtlety and depth that's come to be expected of the series. It's another one that Sega will provide in kit form to cash-strapped operators.

A couple of big installation cabinets were drawing interest, too. Hitmaker's *Air Trix* – which combines the freestyle gaming of *Tony Hawk's* with the skateboard interface of *Top Skaters* – hit European arcades in January and did well for Sega.

Making its Euro debut, though, was CRI's *Wave Runner GP*, which offers a hydraulic jetski interface (based around the Yamaha MJ-GP1200R) to accompany the admittedly formulaic *Wave Race*-style gameplay. There are three courses to choose from at the outset – beginner, intermediate and expert – and these take you from the calm waters of a 'South Sea paradise island', through a jungle river (complete with huge waterfall and 50-metre jump) and on to a tricky city harbour. As in *Wave Race*, the water level changes from lap to lap, opening up new ramps and obstacles – but, here, the incredibly enthusiastic hydraulics bump and grind you like a bucking bronco.

Edge's guilty favourite at the show was *Monkey Ball*, the *Marble Madness*-influenced oddity from Amusement Vision. The mere fact that this game has a controller shaped like a banana will ensure its success and could quite possibly save the European arcade industry (though don't quote **Edge** on that).

Significant restructuring

Resurrecting the European arcade market isn't the only challenge facing Sega's European divisions in the coming months however. After the recent announcement that **Yoshio Sakai** would be taking over Kazutoshi Miyake as president and chief operating officer of Sega Europe, **Edge** sat down with the newly appointed head to find out what the new regime spells for European Dreamcast owners, as well as the localisation of multiplatform plans.

"It will be an experience," sighed Sakai-san, diplomatically masking his resignation at having to move his family from Tokyo to Sega's European HQ in Gunnersbury, London. "I was asked to take over from Mr Kazutoshi Miyake a couple of months ago, and my first task will be to restructure Sega Europe to accommodate our new multiplatform strategy." The fact that he can speak very good English was, no doubt, another factor in his appointment.

> "Before, Sony was a dragon, Sega a tiger. The tiger and the dragon never get along, as a proverb says in Japan. But now the tiger and the dragon have to work together"

Sakai-san is keen to point out that news of Sega Europe's demise is exaggerated. Though some departments will be diminished, co-ordination with the major platform holders will be necessary. No numbers were forthcoming, but job cuts will be made across the board, with the sales and marketing departments being hardest hit. Sega's new president will shift the focus away from publishing to becoming the top content provider in Europe.

Key among the new announcements is the decision to hand over European distribution rights to both Sony and Infogrames. Although such moves were widely anticipated, the stark reality of such fierce competitors collaborating was inconceivable just a year ago. Fans of Sega's esoteric approach to game craft will be comforted to hear that Europe will not be left with just the scraps from the Japanese table, though delays for localisation and distribution will be inevitable. Among the more impressive titles to appear on Sega's



Although the location wasn't as exotic as has been the case in previous years, distributors were still keen to attend



Sega is offering several incentives to cash-strapped arcade operators, with several cabinets available in kit form, or in the shape of upgrade packages for existing cabinets

new release schedule are *Ecco The Dolphin* for PS2 and *Panzer Dragoon* for Xbox. "The first consideration for Sega Japan is that Europe has to have growth of game line-up," reassured Sakai-san. "Sega Europe is not going to disappear, even though we will be shrinking down to a smaller scale. We still have a very important role in ensuring the games go through a series of tests before launching."

The product development team will be reshaped to co-ordinate with Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo. In real terms this will mean consultation with both platform holders and Sega Japan deciding which games will be appropriate for the territory and on which platform. This could indicate a different game-to-platform line-up to those in Japan and the US – depending on how well the host systems perform in Europe – but there is unlikely to be much movement.

Those still indulging in the joys of *Phantasy Star Online* will also be eager to hear news of Dream Arena's fate. But Sakai-san could offer no real assurances, vaguely pointing out that existing agreements with BT and consumers had to be honoured. It was an answer that mirrors Sega's commitment to the Dreamcast in general, which remains equally as vague. No indication of an end date to Dreamcast software could be given, though the trickle of games currently coming through is likely to turn into a dribble by the end of the year. The start of 2002 will probably spell the end of Dreamcast titles entirely.

Sakai-san, a key strategist for the Dreamcast in Japan, was clearly disappointed by the console's performance in Europe. "Honestly speaking, we have been selling the hardware in Europe at a loss. From this hardware business, we couldn't get any profit at all. It was a financial barrier to Sega to keep selling hardware negatively. The software was not sufficient but it was also down to marketing issues. The marketing made us suffer and supplying the hardware hurt us."

But Sega must now look to the future and the new president is optimistic about strengthening Sega's brand away from home. He wants to explore 'other' business opportunities in the territory – as long as they do not conflict with the major platform holders – and is keen to make a fresh start with old rivals. "We have to create now; we have to adapt. Before, Sony was a dragon, Sega a tiger. The tiger and the dragon never get along, as a proverb says in Japan. But now the tiger and the dragon have to work together to find some kind of solution to distribution and marketing."







(From top) *Virtua Tennis 2*, *Monkey Ball*, and *Beach Spikers* show great promise and are essential for Sega's plans to breathe new life into the coin-op scene



Sega's new European chief operating officer, Yoshio Sakai, wants to forge stronger relationships with old rivals

Sega's PAL schedule

DC
Floigan Brothers
Propeller Arena
90 Minutes
Virtua Tennis 2
HeadHunter
Rez
Shenmue II

PS2
Virtua Fighter 4
Space Channel 5 series
Rez
HeadHunter
Ecco The Dolphin
Virtua Golf

Xbox
Jet Set Radio Future
Gun Valkyrie
Panzer Dragoon
Sega GT 2002
The House Of The Dead 3
Crazy Taxi Next

GameCube
Super Monkey Ball
Virtua Striker 3 Ver. 2002
Phantasy Star Online

Game Boy Advance
ChuChu Rocket!
Sonic The Hedgehog Advance
Advanced Columns
Puyo Puyo

Game theory goes to college

Games Culture 2001 reveals the growing academic interest in e-entertainment





Among those speaking at the Gaming Cultures conference were organiser Jonathan Dovey (left) and MIT's Henry Jenkins (right), who, with other panellists, covered a broad range of topics

Not so long ago, university professors would have bracketed games alongside other dubious student habits, such as quaffing cider'n'black and listening to Morrissey. However, a growing band of academics are seeing them as a subject worthy of serious study, and Britain's first academic conference devoted to gaming was held at Bristol's Watershed from June 29 to July 1.

There was something of an evangelical air to Games Cultures 2001, with many of those present aware of the need to bang the drum for games as an object of study. "Everyone is sceptical at this point," conceded MIT's professor **Henry Jenkins**. "The industry's suspicious of intellectuals because they think we don't understand the bottom line. The public is suspicious because all they've ever been told about the medium over the last 25 years is whether it's violent or sexist, so they haven't thought of it on a higher level or in an aesthetic field. And academics are suspicious because they see it as a further displacement of the western canon in favour of transitory artefacts of fixation."

Towards a theory of gameplay

And although games theory in still its infancy, significant differences of opinion have already emerged. One school of games theorists – the narratologists – look upon games as texts and analyse them in much the same way as film, television, and other media are dissected. In another school are the ludologists – the name deriving from the board game, Ludo. They put the case for games theory to be a separate field, distinct from other spheres of cultural studies and demanding its own unique methodology.

Both schools were represented in the papers presented at Games Cultures 2001. One session – heavy on the narratology – saw an examination of how *Final Fantasy VII* integrated cinematic storytelling traditions with its gameplay, by Greg Smith of Georgia State University. This was followed by the Brunel University double act of Tanya Krzywinska and Geoff King, who respectively offered a persuasive argument for games as the new home for horror and a comparison of the different experiences of the three 'Die Hard' movies and the two *Die Hard Trilogy* games. Not to be outdone, the ludologist cause was championed by the University of Bergen's Espen Aarseth in his provocative paper, 'Computer Game Aesthetics: Some Thoughts On The Future Of Gaming', and by Jesper Juul, of the University of Copenhagen, whose paper asked, 'What Are Computer Games Really?' confirming that Scandinavian institutions are among the leading voices in European games theory.



However, the narratologists and the ludologists aren't two hostile, mutually exclusive camps – far more unites them than divides them, and not simply a desire for recognition of the merit of their work. This was clear from the chaired debates that followed each paper, with reactions generally positive and delegates reluctant to be overly critical of each other.

> One school of games theorists – the narratologists – look up games as texts. In another school are the ludologists, who put the case for games to be a separate field



"The field is so new and the topic so fresh that everyone has something significant to contribute," offered Jenkins. "And even the mistakes are illuminating. A stupid remark about games is better than no remark at all and you find yourself thinking in new directions in response to each and every thing that's said."

New perspectives

More sociological approaches to games were also in evidence at Games Cultures, with the social aspects of online gaming proving a popular subject. Swarthmore College's Timothy Burke examined the economic behaviour of players in *Ultima Online*, *Asheron's Call*, and *EverQuest*. He found that in all three, players rapidly divide into those who wanted to maximise their cash and resources (some by any means necessary), and those who wanted a more 'moral' economy and seek to play the


Photography: Mark Berry

game 'properly'. This behaviour, he argued, was seemingly automatic and almost exactly in line with neoclassical economics.

T L Taylor of North Carolina State University also looked at MMORPGs, and at their growing popularity with female gamers. She reasoned that women like MMORPGs not for their traditionally masculine hack'n'slash gameplay but for the complex worlds they offer, allowing them to socialise and play with their own identities. This suggests a different relationship between gender and gameplaying than so-called 'pink games' (those targeted specifically at female gamers) often patronisingly assume.

Taking in all the discussions at Games Cultures 2001, the overall impression is that games offer so many diverse experiences that no single theory can adequately accommodate them. Indeed, Espen Aarseth suggests a future where game aesthetics, game culture and game design become individual disciplines within institutions. And with EA's designers already having regular workshops with the MIT faculty, it's clear that academic inquiry will soon play an integral part in not just the way we think about games but in the kind of games we will be playing in the future.

industryopinion

Edge asks: what did you make of Games Culture 2001?

In the future, this conference may be regarded as an important birthplace of a new field, game studies, which seemed to emerge overnight, with fully developed paradigms already at war with each other, and an enormous degree of passion and excitement from all involved. The conference came in the midst of a phase of self-examination and innovation in the games industry as designers, players, and critics are starting to articulate a theory of game design and game culture. Such self-examination may be a necessary step for games to achieve their full potential as an emerging medium. When you actually engage academics with games and the conceptual questions around them, people who would otherwise get outraged actually get excited. There really are some significant theoretical and conceptual issues here. There was a cycle in which theory played a crucial role in defining what cinema was and games – in order to push forward beyond what's been a kind of helter-skelter, intuitive evolution – really needs to have a more theoretical engagement.

Professor Henry Jenkins director of Comparative Media Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

What comes out of the games industry in this century will be as important as what came out of the cinema in the last century. In terms of our media culture, the new forms of interactive entertainment, leisure and art will all probably come from the games field and have some relationship to games and gaming. It's been difficult to persuade industry people that there's a point to an event like this. But I think that the kinds of conversations that people have been having and the kind of questions that come up are the sort of thing that loads of people in the industry would find really relevant and interesting.

Jonathan Dovey School of Cultural Studies at the University of the West of England and organiser of Games Cultures 2001

There's yet to be developed a rigorous approach to games development, and I think the industry can benefit from that. There may be some communications barriers to overcome, but I hope that greater connections are made and it's certainly encouraging to hear what's happening in the States with EA taking academic approaches seriously.

Dino Dini Abundant Software

2001 is really year one of computer game research – the year the field finally comes together as an international academic discipline. The two first international academic conferences, one in Copenhagen in March and the second in Bristol, are the first signs that games are finally accepted as important by the academic world. I expect this field to evolve into a major discipline, at least as large as film studies, where we should try to combine the aesthetic, cultural and design/technological perspectives on games, in a critical dialogue with the industry from which hopefully both parties will benefit. The industry, judging from panels at events like SIGGRAPH, seems to toil with a lot of aesthetic issues, such as the attempt to make game 'narrative' (a most confusing word), and perhaps we can be of some use in providing theoretical assistance. In any short-term, profit-oriented industry, there is a need for long-term basic research, and we can provide that.

Espen Aarseth University of Bergen

This is a medium that is arguably more culturally significant for many people than either TV or film, yet we are only beginning to understand it. This is a medium that probably represents the pinnacle of human-computer interface design – there's so much to learn from Miyamoto et al, yet we too often deride and belittle them as toymakers. The fact that even after 40 years of videogames we still can't adequately define 'gameplay' is a great concern. I think it's vitally important that we start to think about how we are going to develop the developers of the future. If we are ever going to address the near-constant scapegoating and scaremongering over violence, health, and the perceived threat to society posed by PlayStation and Pikachu, and instead, begin to pass on the wisdom and understanding of great interactive designers, we must begin to critically discuss and analyse videogames and gaming. Game Cultures marks an important step towards treating videogames as the equal of film or television as objects of academic study. In the future, I'd be keen to see a greater synthesis of industrial and academic perspectives as I think we have a lot to learn from each other. Traditionally, the academic world has walled itself off from industry. The conference clearly showed how much we all still have to learn about videogames – the time for ivory towers is gone.

Dr James Newman lecturer and course leader in NewMedia, Edge Hill College

The educational establishment has a very important impact on who and how we hire creative and technical folks over the next several years. It's sometimes not obvious to those of us in the industry as we rush around meeting deadlines and getting the next job in that we also need to consider the future employees. As a founder member of TIGA, I think it's really important for us to take a mature perspective on the future and become, dare I say it, a more professional and mature industry. I've had a couple of academics deconstructing a game that I made several years ago, and it was fascinating seeing how they had put it into context of other influences of that time, and even more interesting when they suggested the 'motivation' for some of the creative decisions... forgetting that we were just in a huge rush to meet a deadline and didn't give it much thought at all.

Jason Kingsley Rebellion



GT3 revs up PlayStation2

PlayStation2's blue touch paper is finally lit with the European release of what will be its first million-selling game, *Gran Turismo 3*

Eight months after PlayStation2 arrived in the UK, Sony's 128bit console finally received its first killer app with the release of *Gran Turismo 3 A-spec* on 20 July. Compared to the 'no-key' launch the hardware received in November, Sony pulled out the stops and underlined its command of the mass market with a *GT3* challenge at HMV Oxford Street.

Supported by a pair of Page 3 girls, two journalists from boyracer mag *MAX Power* attempted a 24-hour challenge, carried out in mock bedrooms set up in the window of HMV. Press attention was further sharpened by the presence of Feeder bassist Taka Hirose – Feeder has featured on all three *Gran Turismo* soundtracks. The first 50 punters through HMV's doors also bagged a free *GT3* forcefeedback steering wheel when they bought the game. Almost lost in the crowd was Polyphony supremo **Kazunori Yamauchi**, who flew into the UK for two days.

Speaking through his interpreter Yamauchi-san told **Edge** this was the first time Polyphony had released a game that met both its own high standards and Sony's deadline. "It's the first time I have felt healthy enough after finishing a game to attend its launch," he joked.

To date *Gran Turismos* 1 and 2 have sold over 5.5 million copies in Europe and 17 million globally. And with Sony bundling *GT3* in a £290 PlayStation2 pack from August 1, it is likely to be the first million-selling PS2 title in PAL territories. UK pre-orders of the game topped 100,000 copies, helped no doubt by Sony offering a £10 rebate for customers who pre-ordered through Electronics Boutique. *Gran Turismo 3* has already sold over a million copies in the US after two weeks of release, with Sony calling it the most successful software launch ever. Thirdparty publishers such as Eidos will be hoping *GT3* quickly boosts the console's European installed base. It is rumoured to be holding back the release of completed games such as *Project Eden* until the market is more buoyant.

As for Polyphony's future, Yamauchi-san remains keen to get a second project underway. "When you work on *Gran Turismo* it really demands concentration so it is difficult to find the time," he said. "We are working on different types of games such as RPGs, however, I am also thinking about a motorbike game."







(Top) Even Feeder bassist Taka Kirose made an appearance at the *Gran Turismo 3* launch at HMV. (Above left) With the first 50 punters receiving a free *GT3* steering wheel, a large queue formed before the 9am opening time. (Above) A relaxed Kazunori Yamauchi, director of *Gran Turismo* developer Polyphony Digital, flew over for the launch of his latest game

SpaceWorld 2001 plans begin to crystallise

Nintendo's Gameboy Advance SpaceWorld line-up begins to take shape, while news that Sony will be holding its own event to showcase PlayStation2 spells trouble for the beleaguered Tokyo Game Show



The Makuhari Messe Convention Centre will once again provide the backdrop for the annual showcase of Nintendo titles, with playable GameCube titles set to take centre stage

After the company's strong showing at E3, Nintendo will be unveiling the new stages of its next-gen strategy at its Spaceworld 2001 expo, which is set to take place on August 24-26 at the Makuhari Messe Convention Centre. As usual, members of the public will be allowed entry to the event on both Saturday and Sunday, while Friday will be reserved for members of the press and industry professionals.

As indicated last issue, **Edge** expects the company to use the event to make an announcement regarding its plans for network connectivity, with Sega expected to play a significant role. Although GameCube will no doubt be the main focus of the show, the complete roster of titles that will be displayed has yet to be confirmed. Details have emerged, though, regarding the line up of Gameboy Advance titles that will be put on view. Whetting the appetites of Nintendophiles will be, among others, the next title in the *Super Mario* series, based on *Super Mario World*; *Donkey Kong: Coconut Crackers*; *Advance Rally*; and *Gradius Generations*.

Meanwhile, in a potential blow to the continued success of the biannual Tokyo Game Show, Sony has announced that it too will hold its own exhibition to showcase its titles. The PlayStation2 Summer Celebration will take place at the start of August, at Sony's Japanese headquarters, and the titles on display will include *Final Fantasy X* and *Devil May Cry*. Expect a full report next issue. With recent Tokyo Game Shows failing to capture the imagination of the Japanese gaming public, demonstrated by a downturn in attendance, a reduced number of titles on display and fewer companies in attendance, the future continues to look uncertain for the event given the willingness of major developers and publishers to forfeit a significant presence there. It remains to be seen, though, whether the anticipated upswing in videogame sales will be sufficient to justify a twice-yearly exhibition.

Final Fantasy flick rolls out

Advance screening suggests that poor US box office performance and sceptical critical reception could be repeated in the UK

After an underwhelming box office performance over the weekend of its US release and a series of mixed reviews, 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within' is set to arrive in UK cinemas on August 3. But an advance screening at the Leicester Square Odeon, held on July 22, suggests that gamers expecting the celluloid outing to match the sophisticated heights of the videogame series will be disappointed, and mainstream cinephiles will more than likely be left cold by the dense sci-fi plot.





In its favour, 'The Spirits Within' does, as expected, raise the bar for CGI animation in movies, featuring some incredible action set pieces as well as several moments of technical flamboyance – notably sections that see characters inhabiting zero-gravity spaces. It also benefits from some snappy buddy dialogue and interaction, well characterised by a strong cast – particularly Steve Buscemi – but it veers between this and a verbose and longwinded explication of the logic underlying the mystical theology that is relied upon to provide the narrative with some intrinsic tension. Unfortunately, despite the strain placed on the vocal talents of Donald Sutherland, and the attention spans of viewers, these laborious interchanges don't succeed in establishing any inherent conflict. And although they're effective, the bombastic action sequences are insufficient compensation for a narrative resolution that is ultimately both disappointing and an example of the worst kind of Hollywood excess.

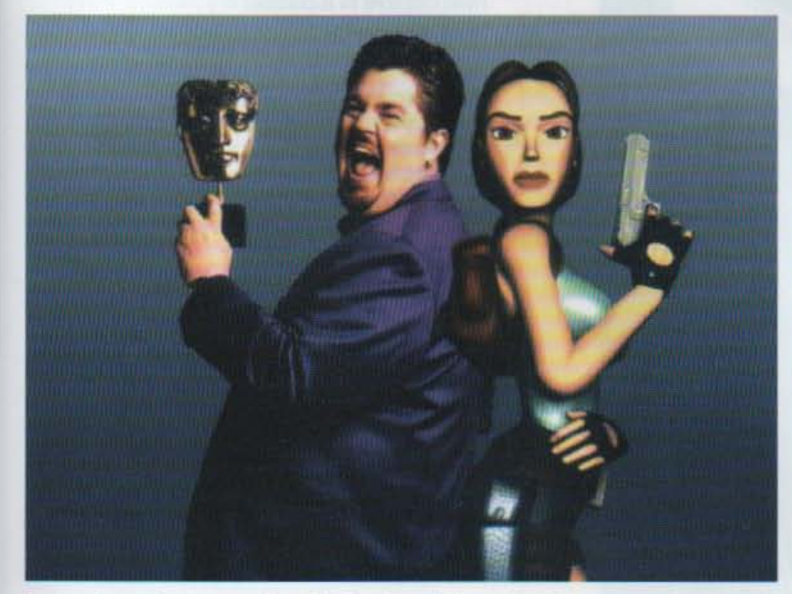
At a rumoured cost of over $100 million, it will be bad news for Square's investors, should the film fail to find a mainstream audience. The lesson that these investors could do well to learn – if they haven't already gleaned it from the successive failures of *Street Fighter*, *Mortal Kombat* and *Mario Bros* movies – particularly given the involvement of *Final Fantasy* creator, Hironobu Sakaguchi, is that cinema and games are two distinct genres. The irony is that in terms of character, setting, tone, and action, 'The Spirits Within' could have made an excellent videogame.



Ultimately the plot of 'The Spirits Within' proves to be more wooden and lifeless than the film's synthespian protagonists

BAFTA awards spiced up by celebrity jurors

Judging process for this year's Interactive Entertainment Awards gets underway, with industry veterans joined by celebrity jurors in deciding line up of nominees to go through to final awards ceremony in October



Last year's awards ceremony host, Phill Jupitus, will be turning his hand to a spot of celebrity judging this year, deciding on nominees along with several other high-profile jurors

With the deadline for entries to the BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Awards now passed, the attention of the judging committee turns to the thorny issue of deciding which entries are to be nominated for consideration at the final awards ceremony.

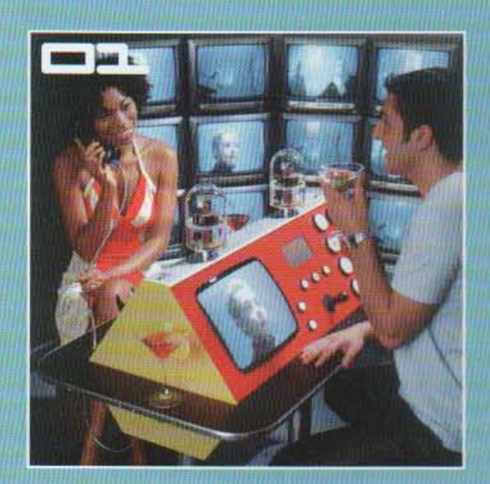
The 16-strong panel that is to decide which of this year's entries will join the likes of *Perfect Dark*, *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, and *Deus Ex* in picking up a BAFTA includes several representatives from the videogame industry sitting alongside a broader range of new media and multimedia representatives who will focus on the non videogame categories. Clive Robert of Deep Red Games and THQ's Grant Dean are joined by industry stalwarts Peter Molyneux of Lionhead and Jez San of Argonaut.

Each committee member will be responsible for overseeing the judging process of a single category, with the eventual winners decided by a five-strong jury per category. With jurors receiving materials at the start of August, they will have the whole of the month to form their preliminary decisions, but the real meat of the judging process will take place over an intensive two-week session held at Thames Valley University at the start of September, which will see a whole day given over to each category.

In a bid to raise the profile of the awards, this year sees a number of celebrity jurors taking part in the judging process. Dave Stewart, Gail Porter and author Jeanette Winterson will all be participating, focusing on such categories as Best Entertainment Website, while Phill Jupitus and Simon Pegg, of the Channel 4 series, *Spaced*, will sit on the juries that are to decide the nominees for the Best Videogame categories.

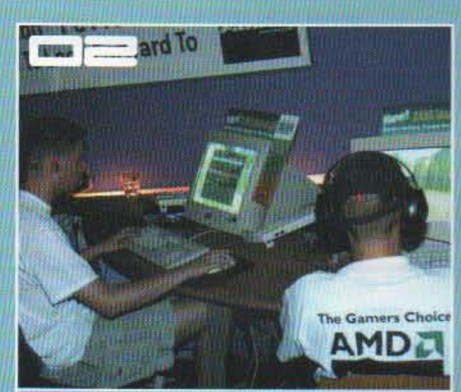
Nominations will be announced on September 24, with winners to be announced at the final awards ceremony at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London on October 25.

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE

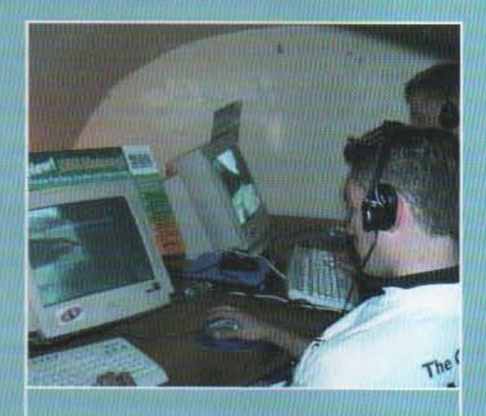


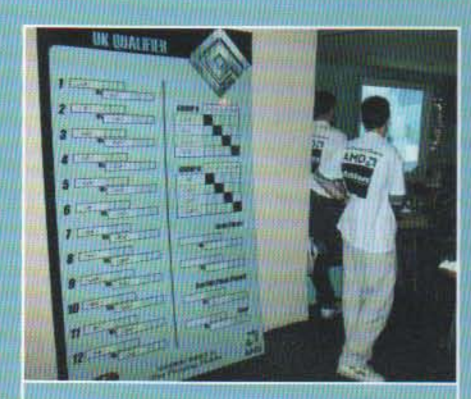


The interactive eye-spy dating terminals which add a whole new meaning to the phrase 'bust a move'

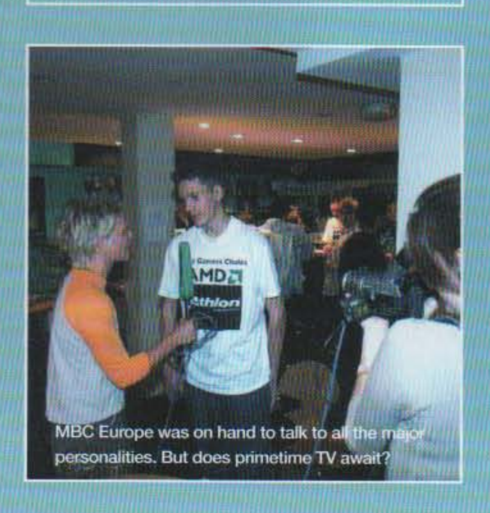


NoC's Renegade proving his *Counter-Strike* skills. But how long before he joins the cardigan brigade?





The winners of the CPL UK playoffs now go on to to the all-important European championships



MBC Europe was on hand to talk to all the major personalities. But does primetime TV await?

01 How to control a relationship

US: Stateside clubbers dissatisfied with their daily dose of reality TV will now be able to find another outlet for their voyeuristic tendencies. Punters at club Remote, situated in the Bowery neighbourhood of New York, will be given full control over the venue's 50 closed-circuit television monitors. The idea was conceived by CEV (Controlled Entropy Ventures) and the system includes a further 40 'cocktail consoles' complete with messaging facilities and joysticks. Simply find an attractive member of the opposite sex, zoom in on their particulars and then send a missive to their designated terminal. A novel idea capable of improving even the most obvious "Hi, I'm Dave Taurus" routine.

02 You have just been retired

UK: Are *Quake III* champions a dying breed? At the Playing Fields on July 8 both *Counter-Strike* and *Quake III Arena* clans came together to contest their annual CPL (Cyber Athlete's Professional League) European Championships. But now *Counter-Strike* is by far the most popular online combat game with *Quake* devotees seen as something of an anachronism. "It is an interesting time," commented tournament organiser **Edward Watson**. "This year was possibly the climax for the *Quake III* clans. They are getting older and their occupations mean they can't get the practice in any more." While NoC took top spot in the *Counter-Strike* competition, team Unreal was victorious in its *Quake III* challenge. But will their mice and keyboards be replaced with pipes and slippers by next year?

Soundbytes

"The hero Ash's mother is kidnapped by small girl Molly's rampant phallic imagination, and held captive in a palatial crystallised vulva"

Mark Sinker lays the *Pokémon* mythos bare in his *Sight and Sound* review of the latest movie

"The mindset the games induce is one of sustained concentration turned into intricate relationships between spaces, objects and sounds. Lara Croft Tomb Raider's knockabout combat can't induce anything so complex"

Rob White highlights the pitfalls for the celluloid versions of moneyspinning videogame franchises in his *Sight and Sound* review of the *Tomb Raider* film

"Seeing the person in the next seat playing a videogame while you are trying to puzzle out a law question is demoralising"

Ian Ayres laments the use of laptops in his law classes in the *International Herald Tribune*

"One of the great battles we face today is to persuade our children away from computer games towards what can only be described as worthwhile books"

So they're definitely not art then, at least according to a rather atavistic outburst from **HRH Prince Charles**

R-Type loading error

UK: Based in Preston, Double Dutch Designs Ltd is a small hardware and software development company attempting to turn consoles into code-hungry computers. The company's PlayStation development includes a ZX Spectrum emulator and its very own easy-to-use *retroBASIC* code. The system utilises a simple homebrew keyboard for input and for those less experienced there are plans to develop a commercial keyboard interface which will plug into the serial port of the PSone. The system already runs games such as *R-Type*, *Jet Set Willy* and *Pajamarama*. "We want to take the user back to the days of simple programming of home computers," state company directors **James Dexter** and **Anthony Ball**. Check out www.doubledutchdesigns.com for details of how to get involved.

Super furry animal

UK: Edge reader Jason Thomas was so unhappy with Sega's advertising strategy that he decided to show them how it should be done. The result is his vision of a *Sonic Adventure 2* campaign designed to appeal to a more 'mature' audience. It does, of course, come complete with erotic camera angle.

Chips on toast

UK: If toast is the only thing you have time to consume in the morning, you may be interested to hear of an appliance which can brown your bread and give you the all-important weather forecast before you rush to work. Designed by Robin Southgate of Brunel University, the ingenious device uses a Java-coded microprocessor to dial a freephone telephone number and prints the symbols with a special heat-resistant mask. The Java toaster went on display as part of his final year project this summer and, rather fittingly, Southgate hopes to get a job in design forecasting.

Data Stream

Number of Xbox units Microsoft expects to sell within the first fiscal year: **4.5-6 million**

Number of Xbox units to be available at launch: **600,000-800,000**

Number of PS2 units Sony expected to sell within its first fiscal year: **10 million**

Number of *GT3* units sold in first week of US release: **1 million**

Game with fourth-largest sellthrough in one week in the UK: ***Gran Turismo 3: A-spec***

Game with third-largest sellthrough in one week in the UK: ***Smackdown 2***

Game with second-largest sellthrough in one week in the UK: ***Gran Turismo 2***

Game with 1st largest sellthrough in one week in the UK: ***Pokémon Yellow***

Number of employees laid off by *Metroid Prime* developer, Retro Studios: **26**

Price of Matsushita's GameCube DVD player: **¥40,000 (£230)**

Proportion of students who would rather have a PS2 than a £300 bar tab in survey by PlayStation2 Student Network: **57%**

Number of tracks to be featured on the forthcoming *Resident Evil Code: Veronica X* audio compact disc: **46**

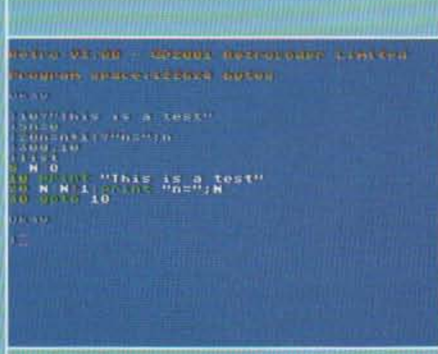
New sponsor signed by Microsoft to promote its Xbox console: **Vans**

Average number of videogame consoles owned by an **Edge** editorial team member: **11.3**

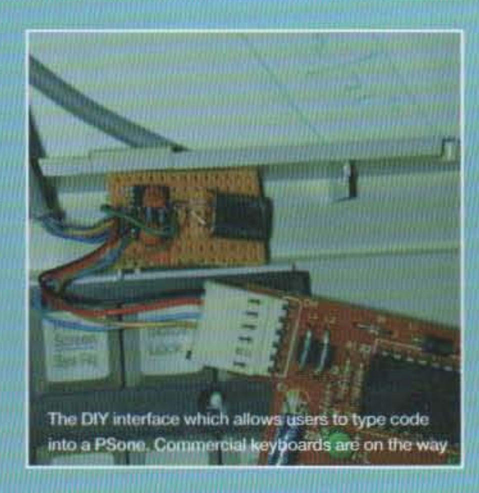
Number of *Final Fantasy X* units sold on the first week of release in Japan: **1.9m**



Double Dutch Designs also offer a ZX Spectrum emulator. What will the mighty PlayStation do next?

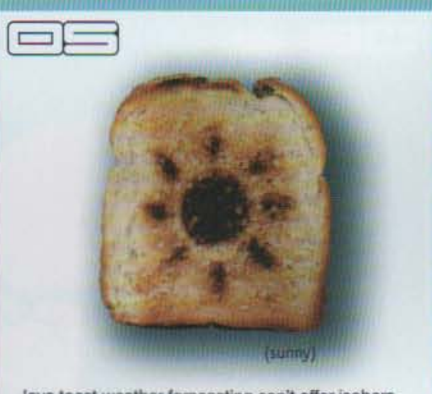


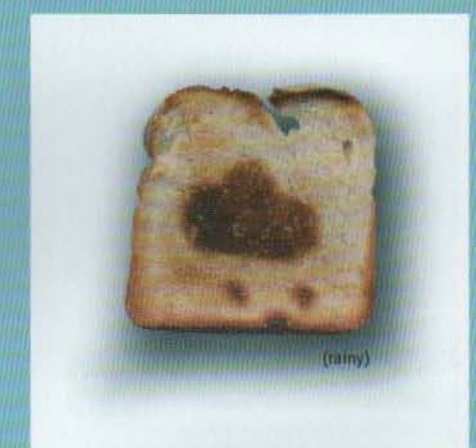
All those hours typing code into the Dixon's display C64 can now come to the fore on your PlayStation!


The DIY interface which allows users to type code into a PSone. Commercial keyboards are on the way

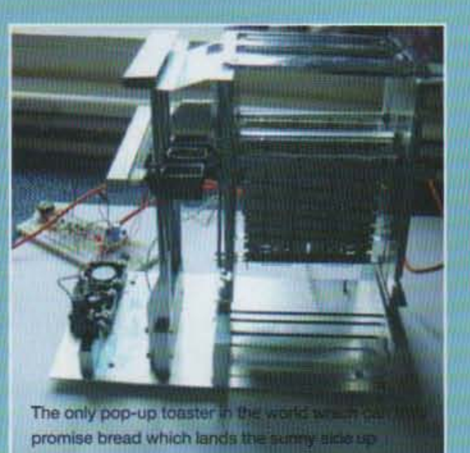


An imaginative take on Sega's mascot. But you should have seen his treatment of the Sega swirl

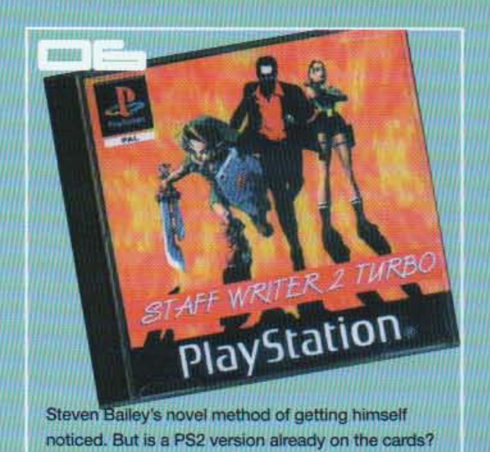




Java toast weather forecasting can't offer isobars but it still beats a prolonged dose of Wincey Willis


The only pop-up toaster in the world which can promise bread which lands the sunny side up





Steven Bailey's novel method of getting himself noticed. But is a PS2 version already on the cards?



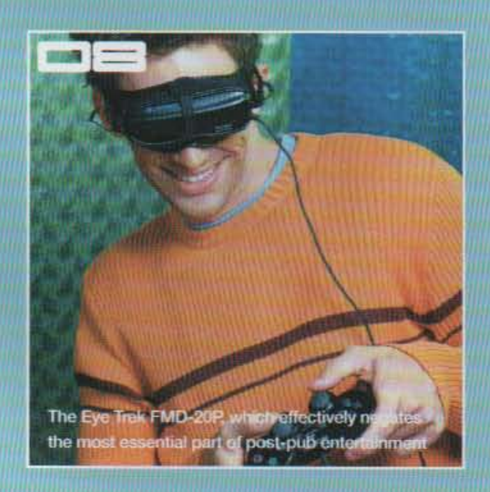




Yuji Naka's rhythm-action style of management is sure to outfox even the most disciplined side



Expect Nagoshi-san to introduce his very own personality to the crowded football genre



The Eye Trek FMD-20P, which effectively negates the most essential part of post-pub entertainment





The creatives responsible for the forthcoming *Rez*. Can they really be trusted with all that technology?

06 How to get ahead in journalism

UK: Make sure your CV stands out from the crowd. That's advice doled out by secondary school careers officers across the country. But it was a recommendation firmly taken to heart by **Edge** reader Steven Bailey. Though **Edge** isn't currently hiring, Bailey's imaginative game-style CV – complete with instruction booklet on his life and education – did much to impress the team. 'Apologies for the awful title' cautions the box cover. "It was either that or 'King of the Writers'. Someone give this man a job.

07 Sega's in-house soccer stars

Japan: Usually shy and retiring, Sega developers are clearly beginning to warm to the limelight. Witness these digital versions of Yuji Naka and Toshihiro Nagoshi which will appear in the forthcoming *Virtua Striker 3*. Along with other secrets – such as a Sonic The Hedgehog character – the Team Sonic and AM2 group heads will be available to unlock as team managers. Expect the half-time team talks to be a touch on the unusual side.

08 Eye Trek: the next generation

UK: Olympus is to release a PlayStation 2-specific version of HMD's Eye Trek FMD-20P in the UK. The device boasts a hi-res monitor which offers 'the equivalent of watching a 52-inch TV from two metres away'. **Edge** tested the £300 headset and found the picture quality to be surprisingly good, despite the unavoidable pixellisation experienced when pressing your face to a TV screen. Furthermore, an extended gaming session left **Edge**'s guinea pig unable to negotiate his own living room. Fortunately, this happens to him most weekends, so no harm was done. Call stockists on 0800 072 0070 for more.

09 Begging for recognition

Japan: 'I suggested you would be more willing to part with 15 issues if we were to take a picture of us begging like dogs!' began a heartfelt email from Sega's United Game Artists team after reading a translation of **E**100's *Rez* preview. The copies are on the way. But is this really how dogs beg in Japan?

Continue

***Silent Hill 2*'s haunted house press trip**
But KCEA's Takayoshi Sato would not go down 'the hole'
The Bitmaps returning on GBA
Link-up *Speedball II* on the go ahoy
BBC2's 'That Thing'
For examining Lara Croft without focusing on the obvious



Channel 5's 'Lara Croft: Lethal And Loaded'
For examining Lara Croft in a wholly risible manner
Microsoft's *Dungeon Siege* girls campaign
Yes, you can have a hand in voting for a pretend woman
'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within'
The sublime Aki Ross just does not compensate for this tosh



10 Emergence

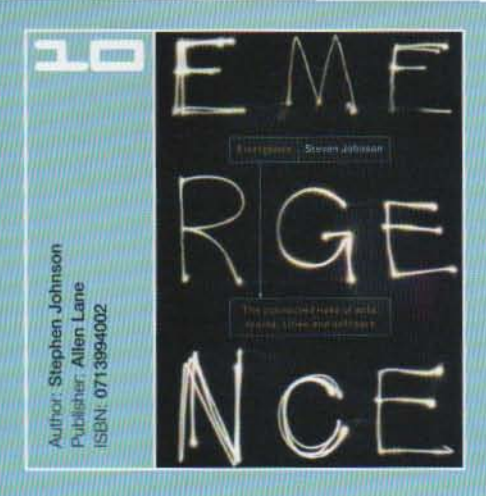
What do WTO anti-globalisation protesters, ant colonies and *SimCity* all have in common? In his new book Stephen Johnson argues that all these, and even life itself, rely on a phenomenon that is as profound as it is simple. Emergence is the idea that several equal individuals working together can collectively, without necessarily being conscious of it, cause intelligent and coherent events to happen. The Seattle protesters had no leadership, yet their hive-like actions made them seem like an organised army. Ants are not issued with instructions from their queen, yet by simply following a few simple rules, dictated by their genes, they form colonies and have become the most populous life form on earth. *SimCity* has no set script, but as the player carefully adds buildings and roads a city emerges. Of course, the idea of emergence isn't new and Johnson's book isn't the first to broach the subject. Kevin Kelly's tome 'Out of Control', published in 1994, is still the definitive work, and academics have been working on the idea for decades before that. Game developers, such as John Conway with his seminal Game Of Life and Steve Grand with *Creatures*, have also used the principles of emergent phenomena with amazing results. But while Kelly, Grand and Conway delved into the technical wonders of emergence both in the natural and virtual worlds, Johnson takes the story one step further and explores emergence in society. Johnson connects the Zeitgeist of avant-garde social, political and scientific thinking brilliantly; the question is: is it the truth?

11 The Future Just Happened

Does the name Jonathan Lebed ring a bell? How about Marcus Arnold? Probably not, but to Michael Lewis these two mid-teen American kids are fascinating. Fourteen-year-old Lebed made international headlines in the summer of 2000 for being the youngest Wall Street fraudster, according to Wall Street's fraud Police, the Securities and Exchange Commission. Lebed used the Internet to make more than $800,000 by posting multiple, bogus claims about various stocks on share-trading notice boards. Arnold, a 15-year-old from California, fancied himself as a legal consultant and got involved in a Web site offering legal advice called AskMe.com. After rising to the third position out of 150 experts – simply by giving advice from knowledge he'd gleaned from watching TV and other reading other websites – he confessed to his age because of the demands on his 'knowledge' were becoming too much. The backlash from his online fans was scathing as he had beaten several experienced career lawyers in the site's ranking for some time. These boys, and others, are the stars of The Future Just Happened. Lewis has spent a year travelling the globe to find out what makes them tick and how the Internet has helped them to upset the adult's established order. Lewis argues that these unlikely – and more to the point unwitting – social revolutionaries of our time are affecting and in some cases shifting the old-world order. A funnier, more inspiring, story about the unsung heroes of the Internet is yet to have been told.

10

Author: **Stephen Johnson**
Publisher: **Allen Lane**
ISBN: **0713994002**



11

Author: **Michael Lewis**
Publisher: **Hodder & Stoughton**
ISBN: **034079500X**



12



Site: **NTSC-UK**
URL: **www.ntsc-uk.com**

12 Web site of the month

Import gaming may be an acquired taste but it's essential for those itching for the purity of the latest Japanese releases. NTSC-UK is a group of dedicated gamers offering advice on how to acquire both past and present NTSC classics. With a clean presentation and a passionate writing style, the site also indulges in reviews, previews and features. Let them make turgid letter-boxed games a thing of the past in your home.

13



13 Advertainment

Japan: Another month, and another GBA advert hits Japanese television screens. Unlike many other companies in videogaming right now, Nintendo continues to splash its cash with prolific marketing.

01-03 Voiceover: "Game Boy Advance" 04-05 Man on podium: "Up until now, the method employed wasn't satisfactory" 06 "Open the way yourself" 07 "Forget the common ideas and do your own thinking" 08 "Get your own personal magic power" 09 "Have you ever seen such battle sequences?" 10 Voiceover: "Get rid of the world's monsters" 11 "Yes, this truly is an RPG - a milestone!" 12 Voiceover: "*Ogon no Taiyo*" 13 Man again: "Come on, have you ever seen such a thing?!" 14 Audio: GBA buttons being manically pressed.

REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Ageing: changing tastes over time



Mornings laced with hazy memories of ill-feeling, afternoons where pounding guilt comes with every clumsy stab at the keyboard. Like a tired cop-movie cliché, RedEye's too old for this shit. Last month's column was a product of that: needlessly wired, stupidly angry. Call it centennial tension, which makes this the textual hangover. This month, RedEye will keep the drug analogies, violent cynicism, and pop-cultural references to a minimum. This month, RedEye will play nice.

RedEye will play nice because life's too short for anything else. Last night RedEye bumped into an old hardcore gaming friend in his local, and – after a couple of hours catching up, dating key events by the annual editions of Mega Drive *NHL* and *Madden* – the friend asked him to explain what an Xbox is. We're all getting older, and RedEye's getting The Fear. How do the hardcore turn casual? What happens next? *Tetris* level nine reactions fade to eight, seven, six... a terrifying inexorable countdown towards gaming ineptitude and, presumably, a fate worse than *Myst*. Oh, and death. Scary stuff. RedEye gets out his Game Boy and has a quick game just to make sure. Level nine's too fast. It must be the headache.

All this futurephobia comes from several things, not least when RedEye hears about the imminent departure of **Edge**'s editor-in-chief. RedEye's first reaction is a moment of silence, then to chalk him up as just another lost soul to girlfriends and mortgages. Because that's what seems to be the pattern: they find a girl, they settle down, and they kick off partnered bliss by bartering over console floorspace. Then she insists there's no room for the 3DO or CDi, and pretty soon their whole collection's going to a silicon scrap merchant on Ebay for just under a score. RedEye's partners have always looked at his Jaguar with some suspicion. RedEye has The Fear.

But it also comes from a conversation RedEye overhears in the pub. A PC magazine's work experience boy is chatting amiably to a group of nodding-dog journos, and all is fine right up until the moment the youngster informs an **Edge** staffer that *Bust-A-Move*'s a great game – "If you're under six years old." RedEye is pleased that the unofficial **Edge** response contains roughly equal measures of anger, swearing, and informative points on videogame design. RedEye paraphrases: bright colours and simple dynamics are not synonymous with youth, and shooting the same teenager over and over in the head within the greys and browns of *Counter-Strike*'s concrete schoolyard does not make you an adult.

It's the same worldview that conditions some older gamers into shame of their habit. Here's the perceived gaming life-cycle: *Pokémon*, *Croc*, *Smackdown*, *Doom*, *Counter-Strike*, *FIFA*, *Gran Turismo* – and then either *Myst* and *Solitaire*, or straight to the final stop: death. To put it in a next-gen context, do the same with consoles: GameCube for the grinning kids, Xbox for the styleless teens, PS2 for the self-conscious twenty-somethings, and patronising smiles and pats on the head from everyone else. Pigeonholing is easy; fighting against the public perception of gaming as kids' stuff is difficult. RedEye still loves videogames, so why should he stop? Answer: he's not going to.

And then there's the doubt, because maybe they're right. RedEye's noticed a definite, albeit gradual, change in his gaming habits as he's moved away from the life-destroying RPGs and simulations that defined huge parts of his early gaming life, and firmly into the quick fix. It's not that he's not got the time for games these days, but more that his attention span is dropping and his quality threshold is rising. The passion's not diminishing, it's just getting more specific.

RedEye's attention span is dropping and his quality threshold is rising. The passion's not diminishing, it's just getting more specific

He's increasingly seeking solace in the port-heavy GBA, and thoughts of portable *Chaos Engine* excite as much as anything else in this year's pre-release list. Nostalgia is appealing. Put it down to a vague attempt at recapturing youth, or the fact that this month's RedEyes come from rose-tinted cataracts. Or put it down to the fact that the short, immediate games that thrived on the machines in the 16bit era suit RedEye's current mindset more. People change. RedEye played those games then because there wasn't anything else. RedEye plays them now because he wants to.

Still, disillusioned gamers flood to Internet forums decrying the state of the games industry in trembling last-chance voices and hoping, praying for Nintendo salvation. It may happen, but the clock's ticking. A phonecall to **Edge**'s soon-departing editor reveals the average age of the readership to be somewhere around 23. A new survey will probably reveal a higher number. You're not getting any younger. RedEye, ever the philanthropist, scribbles down an apocalyptic prophecy, just in case you don't make it to the future.

The world is at war, and **Edge** exists only as a 100-foot-tall videogame review robot dispensing verbal justice from the skies with acerbic, cliché-free missiles. Nintendo is a nuclear superpower, sending candy-cute winged birds of destruction to impact on the gelatinous skin-moulds of Sony's Godzilla Aibos. Microsoft takes development of its exponentially next-gen console to Saturn for public testing by temperature-resistant, caterpillar-tracked paraplegics. RedEye still likes videogames, but his attention span has dropped through the floor, and the only digital entertainment he can stomach is a one-dimensional version of *Pong*. That, my friends, is The Fear.

And the same might be true of you, too, because, hey, by then, we'll all be too old for this shit. Listen: all your records sound the same, and you can't tell the boys from girls any more, and in RedEye's day all of this was ASCII. There's no answer. Things change, and people change. Someday we'll all be too old to do anything apart from sit under matted orange blankets and take bets on which of our organs will fail next. Someday we'll learn to ignore people and defy demographic preconceptions; someday we'll learn to stop worrying about the future. RedEye takes out *Tetris* and plugs in *Pokémon*. It's going to be a long day.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Graphics: keeping it unreal

The future has turned out to be further away than we thought. A few years ago, many people hoped that the next generation of videogame systems would finally deliver the holy grail of visual engineering – photorealism. It didn't happen. Perhaps this has been disappointing; but perhaps, too, we should take stock of visual aesthetics and decide what we have to gain, and to lose, from the prospect of true photorealism.

The most obvious problem is an increasing gulf between the logic of appearance, and the logic of behaviour. If you're going to raise the retinal stakes to a photorealistic degree, a comparable increase in gameplay coherence will also be necessary. Parts of *Gran Turismo 3* look tantalisingly close to the photorealistic ideal, for instance, but this sensuous believability renders the absence of car damage all the more incongruous, even if we know it to be a commercially determined limitation.

This problem becomes more pressing in videogames that encourage exploration of complex environments. Up until now, gameplayers have agreed to accept that if an in-game object is just a clump of flat pixels, then it has no functional use in the game. But imagine a completely photorealistic environment in some future iteration of *Biohazard*, and it becomes clear that if something looks exactly like a lamp, or a book, and yet we can't pick it up or read it, then we are going to feel frustrated at the arbitrary limits placed upon our interaction. *Shenmue*, though nowhere near photorealism, at least makes a creditable attempt at this sort of wildly thing-populated world, but it too has limits: you cannot, for example, simply decide to steal one of the bikes outside the motorcycle shop in Dobuita and go for a ride.

Ideally, a gamer should never arrive at the hard limit of interaction in this way, where a game just tells you: 'Sorry, no, that's not part of the game, don't bother'. On the contrary, a gamespace should be like the Einsteinian concept of spacetime. Travel in some lightspeed-defying spaceship to the edge of the universe and you don't just smash into a cosmic wall; you follow a straight line through space that curves back in on itself and eventually delivers you back to where you came from. This sort of internal coherence has historically been easy to deliver in largely symbolic games – from *Pac-Man* and *Defender* to, say, *Bangai-O*. But in complex, iconic modern games that aspire to visual realism and offer us a host of complex actions, it is far more rare.

The other major problem of taking photorealism as a goal is, of course, the imaginative limitations it imposes. *Metropolis Street Racer* did an astonishing job of delivering recognisable recreations of central London, for example, but it would be a shame if thousands of still photographs and hundreds of hours of video footage became de rigueur as raw material for all videogames. After all, part of the joy of videogames is the interaction with environments that could not possibly exist in the real world. In this sense, *Wipeout Fusion* stands as a greater artistic achievement than *MSR*.

This is not to say that all games should adopt a moody, sci-fi rollercoaster aesthetic. But the distant prize of photorealism does appear to strap blinkers on to some developers while it is still not possible. Here it is the exceptions that demonstrate the rule. Cel-shading's first appearance in *Jet Set Radio* was an unforgettable breath of fresh air among the usual slew of pathologically dark, pointy, pseudo-realistic videogames. And the work-in-progress shots of *Exo*'s gorgeously naked cityscape have had observers crossing their fingers in the hope that the developers do not get around to adding textures at all, or at least that they won't get as texture-happy as so many current designers who smother their spaces in meaningless detail.

One definition of visual aesthetics, after all, might be that it is the art of knowing what to leave out. In the rush for realism in computer graphics, however, it is all too common to throw everything in, and leave the spectator navigating a visual field of hyperspecific effects – excitable lighting, rivets on everything – and unable to see the wood for the trees. SquareSoft's notoriously expensive CGI-generated *Final Fantasy* film is a case in point. Watching it, one becomes fascinated by the extraordinarily lifelike movement of a strand of digital hair, for example, or the reflective qualities of an eyeball, in a way that becomes highly distracting.

As a whole, in fact, *Final Fantasy* stands as something of an exemplary folly in the quasi-art of 'realistic' graphics. Not only have the mouths of the actors speaking the lines been digitised and mapped on to their avatars, but every human movement, for however anonymous a gun-toting grunt, has been motion-captured from real humans in ping-pong-ball suits. You get people to do all this – and then you throw the people away. The end result has only a sort of eerie impressiveness, like watching a play performed by ghosts. Why try so hard to replicate natural human movement, when live-action cinema does it so well? The style of 'hand-drawn' animation in computer graphics has hardly gone out of fashion since Lara Croft's first appearance. It would have been more interesting for SquareSoft to have gone down the path trodden by 'Shrek', where savage parody of Disney sentiment puts computer animation to purely fabulous uses.

In order to grow into their full artistic potential, videogames will have to embrace other ways of seeing than the photorealistic. But the catch is that it might only truly happen when photorealism actually becomes possible. Once photorealism is no longer the longed-for finish-line of a technological race but a completely routine way of doing things, then we might see, in reaction, a new flowering of more imaginative videogame art. Just as painting was rescued from its cul de sac of painstaking realism by the arrival of photography, and subsequently exploded into impressionism, surrealism and abstraction, so the advent of true realism in computer graphics might free us to become ever more unrealistic.

The most obvious problem is an increasing gulf between the logic of appearance, and the logic of behaviour in videogames

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

Super Monkey Ball is entering its final stages, and I'm so busy, you can't imagine. As a result, I can't think really what to write this time. I mean, my head just seems to have stopped working. So, what to discuss? Okay, let's talk about what a creator has to go through before a game is ready for manufacture.

Typical questions you ask yourself as you near the end of a project include 'Why did I not notice that sooner?', or 'Why did I not do that from the beginning?' My response to that is wondering why we always encounter the same problems each time. I mean, when we start a project, together with my staff I attempt to structure it carefully so the development fits our resources and we can give it as high a level of quality as possible. Then we try to convince each other that this time all will run according to plan, and we start. But it always ends the same way way, with me dead busy and trying not to get discouraged. It's quite a task.

'Do I have the required ability?' Sometimes, I really start to think such things. I have managed development planning for ten years now, but it is still very hard. I know there are many aspects I will never be able to control, as in the course of developing a game things happen which you can't plan for.

A videogame starts with ideas you put into a project. Then you have a vital stage that I term 'development simulation', in which you will try to structure the development. Put simply, for a given development you will consider what could happen in terms of technology, human resources, finance, or time. If you don't take this process seriously, you'll only have yourself to blame when things go wrong. For example, consider a specific feature for a given project. The person in charge is not able to complete it in the given time, and as a result the whole project suffers. Maybe if you had chosen another person, he or she would have done it, or, keeping the same person, if you had given him a little more time, the task would have been finished. Moreover, if you had new tools, the work would have been done faster. These are the kinds of issues you have to address. As a result, we think long and hard before the project in order to limit potential problems or surprises, and having considered all those kinds of things, you are then in a better position to embark on development. However, as I said before, things will always crop up that are out of your control and impossible to plan for, and I see these as falling into three main groups.

The first one is 'Problems not of your own making'. People get ill, have accidents, or, more often, experience personal problems. Now, while some may argue that these people are professionals and so should be able to put private matters to one side, personally I believe that in order to build a great project you are going to face difficulties and you have to keep your nerve – but when problems touch on issues like family or health, I prefer people to put this before work. This is an important aspect of my company. You cannot avoid these sorts of problems if they crop up during development. This is exacerbated because if you work hard over a long time, the chances that these problems will surface are great. When it happens you have to wait until things calm down and then monitor the situation.

The second variety of pitfall is 'The movements of your competitors'. You are developing a game, or plan to, and then all of a sudden another company announces a project very similar to yours, and your selling points would be seen as being similar to your competitor's. In this scenario, I see two ways to go. The first is to delay (or simply change) your release window. The other is to change what can be changed in your project in order to make your game look different, or to improve its level of quality. This is the harder way, of course.

The third point is 'A problem you really have not accounted for happens'. This is the hardest eventuality to deal with. For example, while you are developing your game you find out that one particular feature is getting more and more interesting. You hadn't planned to invest so much time and resources in it, but it has reached the stage where it could be a key sale point. So you decide to lavish more attention on it. This seems simple, but in reality human resources and time have to be managed flexibly, so this situation could become a source of great difficulties. These kinds of ideas emerge when you start to understand that new ideas develop as you work on the project. You can't just put that feature aside, because it makes the project greater, more rich. So you have to consider all of your emerging ideas and incorporate them into the final game.

These three points can reduce your initial schedule to ruins. They include most of the difficulties you can expect during a game development. Don't you think there isn't much you can do about them? Especially the first and second points, you can't do much. So yes, development is very hard. Imagine you are at this very first meeting with our staff when you have to decide how everything is going to run before the project starts. Can you ask your people to not be ill or fall in love over the next year? No, it is impossible.

However, before the challenge begins, you have to be able to prepare for these issues. As a professional, I have to perfectly judge what I can plan for sure during the simulation. Considering my resources, I think through the project excluding what would not be reasonable. Now, since the development of new ideas I spoke about before is unpredictable, you have to prepare a kind of time buffer in your simulation so your team is be able to include as many of them as possible during the development. The success of this simulation is the core element of what I call my 'career'.

If you are successful with your simulation, you will find yourself with more time on your hands and able to improve the quality of your project. I know that this may sound pretentious, but, once again, I'm dead busy, so should I start to think my simulation was wrong? I don't think so. I think this is mostly due to the fact there are more and more challenges to face in game development nowadays, which also makes games more interesting. I'm confident about my current project. There aren't really many days left. We will be ready in time!





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Development: why what can go wrong, will go wrong

You have to decide how everything runs. Can you ask your people to not be ill or fall in love over the next year? No, it is impossible

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Edge's most wanted

Pikmin
On the surface this could be just another RTS game with oddball creatures replacing military units, but expect Nintendo to work its magic on a tired genre.



(GameCube) Nintendo

PaRappa The Rapper 2
Is new character Moosesha related to instructor Mooselin? Will Prince Fleaswallow return? And can PaRappa lift itself to the heights of Gitarooman?



(PS2) Nana On Shaa

Rez
From the creative imagination of a team that begs like dogs, there really shouldn't be any doubt left that *Rez* will refresh gaming palettes jaded by cynical product.



(DC/PS2) Sega

Mario Kart: Super Circuit
From 'Star Wars' to 'Shrek', developers are leaping on to the karting bandwagon. But none can match the genius of the SNES original, now coming to GBA.



(GBA) Nintendo

Which way now?

Multiple organisms vs multiple routes

"Follow the yellow brick road," chanted a throng of munchkins as Dorothy set off on her famous journey to the Emerald City. It was sound advice – until a fork in the path was discovered. But like her we assume a great deal: that a surreal world such as Oz would only have one yellow brick road; that a fork in the path instantly indicates one road to evil, the other to victory; and more importantly, that Dorothy actually has a choice in the matter. A movie's ability to weave a spell is so powerful that we are taken along with the drama hoping that she makes the correct decision.

Not so with videogames. Give us control over a character's actions – however limited – and the illusion of free will is effectively broken. And the more sophisticated videogames become the more we crave the liberty to explore digital space. After playing *Deus Ex* the decidedly on-rails experience of *Shenmue* is disheartening. Videogames which encourage players to actively participate in the fate of the protagonist succeed or fail on the choices delivered.

Until recently developers have generated a sense of freedom in videogames by offering multiple routes and multiple endings. Though not the first game to offer alternate paths, *Space Ace* was something of a revelation upon its release in 1984. After playing the strictly linear quest of *Dragon's Lair*, players were astonished to discover forks in the digital pathway. Though these were originally generated to hinder learned responses, multiple routes have been used ever since. *Deus Ex* is merely the finest example of the method seen to date.

But one of this month's preview titles, *Project Ego* (below), is taking a fresh approach. The game's developer, Big Blue Box, hopes to build a roleplaying experience in which nothing is preordained. It's a system which roundly rejects branching narrative in favour of creatures and characters which respond in more dynamic ways. The actions of the protagonist and his interactions with the world's many inhabitants will become the story. But will such a freeform experience lead to little substance? And just how will the team ensure the game retains internal consistency? Much will depend upon the quality of the encounters and the sophistication of the AI. Big Blue Box has set out on an ambitious quest which may offer a new alternative to multiple-route roleplaying. It should be hoped that it reaches its lofty goals.






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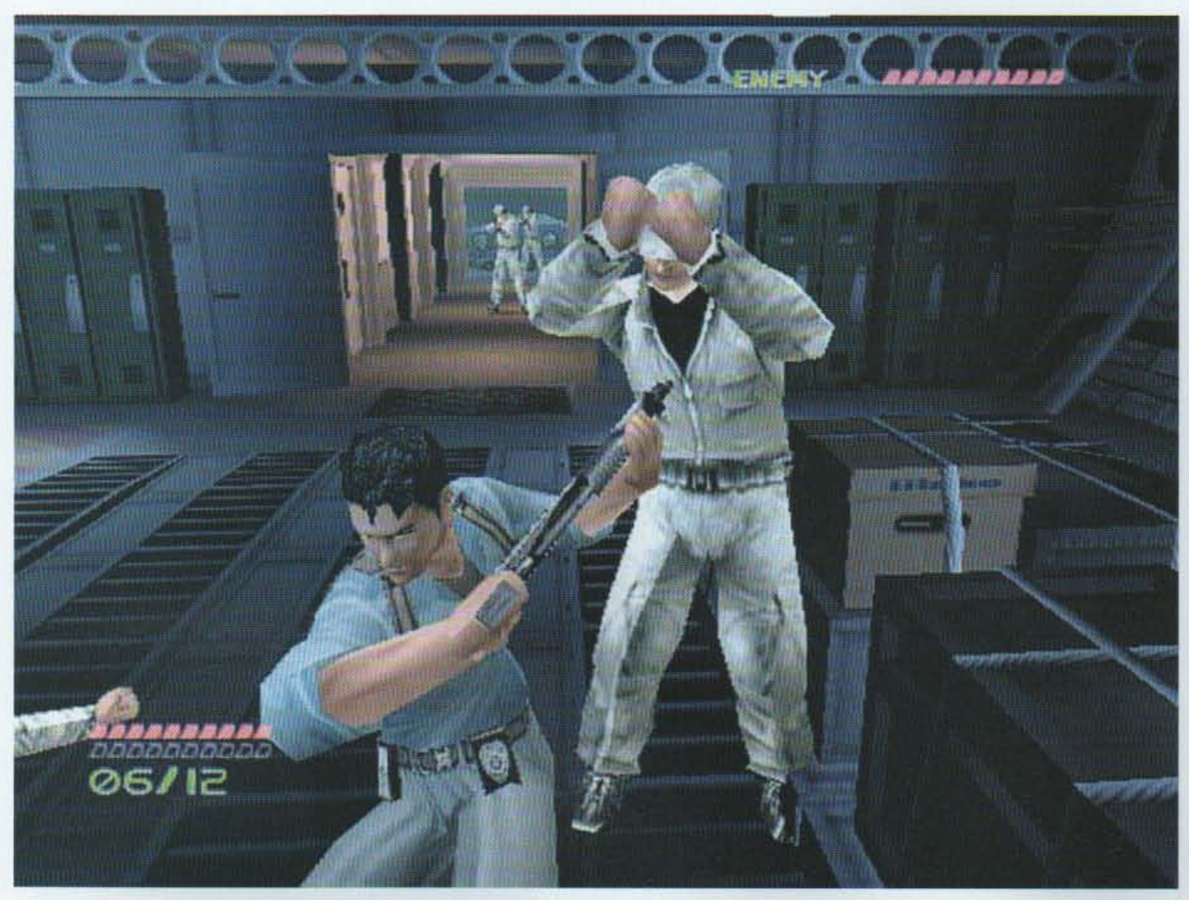

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030

Dead To Rights

Namco slips on its choreographed violence shoes with an action title starring a cop on the warpath who ends up inside doing all sorts of things to earn snouts





Press and hold the disarm button, and Jack grabs the bad guy's gun, spins around, and blows the guy's head off with his own firearm. Tidy



In another interesting use of the analogue buttons, holding down the dive button sees time slow, handing the player the opportunity to take down multiple targets before hitting the floor



It is possible to look around corners *Metal Gear Solid*-style before using the lock-on button to spin out into the open and take out adversaries



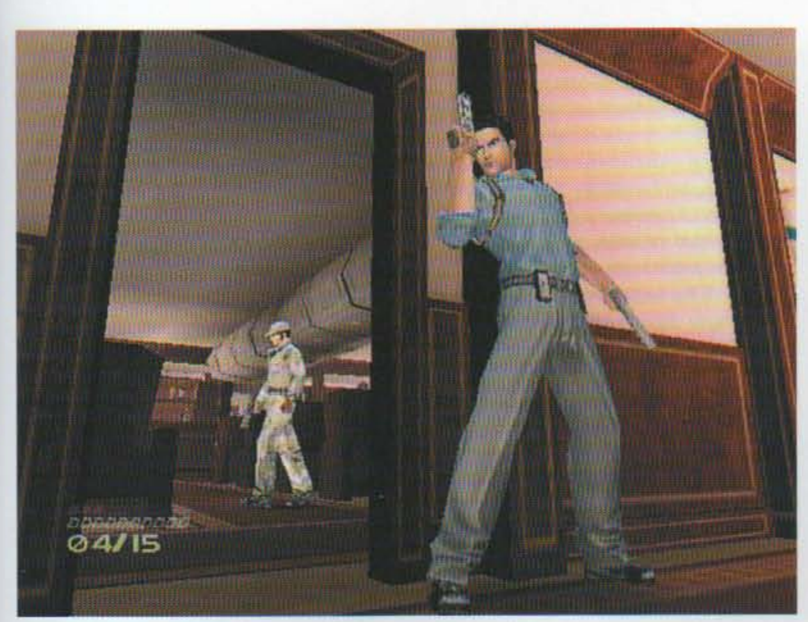
With *Dead To Rights*, Namco USA is presenting its take on action films from the likes of John Woo with a slick, no-holds-barred game that reformulates the rules of the traditional action game.

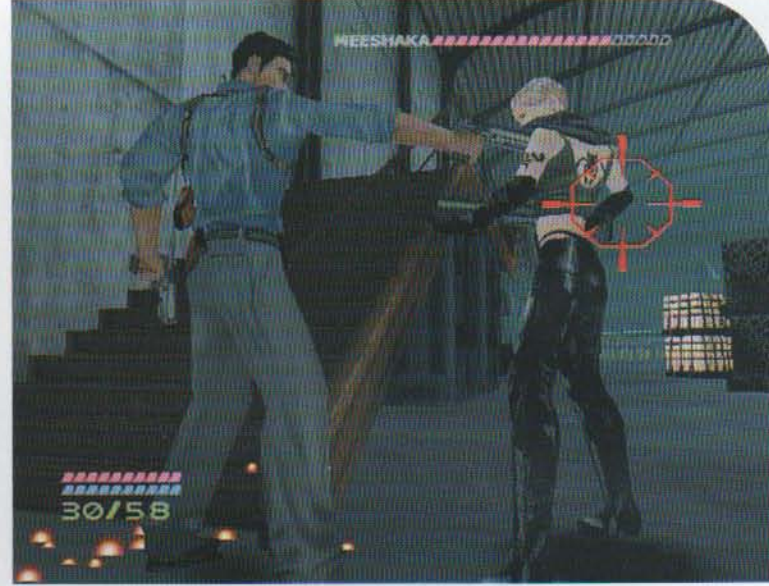
"In a nutshell it's really classic Hong Kong action à la the dramatic bloodshed films meets Hollywood noir of the '40s and '50s," says senior producer **Andre Emerson**. "One interesting way to look at it is almost as if it were 'The Maltese Falcon' done by Chow Yun-Fat."

The hero of this piece is a cop named Jack Slate who is called to an incident while he's heading home. He arrives on the scene and is immediately embroiled in a fierce firefight. During this, however, he stumbles upon his father's body – an ex-cop himself. With vengeance in mind, Jack tracks down the man he believes responsible for his father's death, only to find him murdered. Slate is framed for the slaying, his life thrown into a downward spiral as he attempts to break through the web of deceit and manipulation that enshrouds the city's underworld.

The team is hoping to recreate the core of the Hong Kong action experience – brilliantly choreographed gunfights. Jack isn't just another dumbed-down thirdperson action hero; he actually has a huge variety of moves at his disposal. You can run across a clearing, dive over a table, lock on to an enemy while you're in the air, and shoot before you land. There are plenty of subtle touches, too. If Jack has two guns, for example, and the player hits the fire button at a regular pace, Jack will only use one of them. If the player hits the button faster, though, Jack will bring

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Namco**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q2 2002 (US) TBC (UK)**





The lock-on feature delivers a good solid shot to the chest, but you can shift your aim using the right analogue stick to anywhere on the body you like

up the second weapon for additional firepower. Things really get interesting when you start playing with analog properties of the action buttons. Press down harder on the dive button, for example, and the game will shift to slow motion, enabling you to take out multiple targets before you hit the ground.

"The idea was to put as much of the cinematic control in the hands of the player as we could," explains Emerson. "As much as we like to believe that people want to see our drawn-out sequence every time, there are going to be people who just want to advance through the game."

The designers have focused on creating different gameplay experiences within each area. In the prison level, for example, you're actually an inmate who has to find ways to earn cigarettes so that you can purchase information about an upcoming escape attempt. To get these cigarettes you can arm wrestle or lift weights in mini-games, or you can step into the boxing ring and wager your current earnings. Even the normally mundane act of getting through locked doors has been turned into a coordination-driven mini-game using a lockpick.

The game clips along at a very steady 60fps owing to a dedicated tools team that has been working on the engine since before the system came out. With about a year to go on the project, it's absolutely mindblowing that the team has so much content to show. Still, there's a way to go yet if Namco USA wants to create an action game with a true soul of its own. Emerson elaborates his mission statement for the game by way of closing: "We want to make sure the game's not just about shooting people. Even though there have been many, many games carried by that alone, we truly want to create something that is more of an epic action adventure. Every couple of chapters in the story you're going to get a unique gameplay experience."





If you creep up on someone you can use them as a human shield by holding the action button as you go about shooting your way out of a difficult situation

"One interesting way to look at *Dead To Rights* is almost as if it were 'The Maltese Falcon' done by Chow Yun-Fat"



When it comes to depicting violence, *Dead To Rights* doesn't pull any punches. Nevertheless, this isn't really the focus of the game

PaRappa The Rapper 2



Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sony**
Developer: **Nana-on-shaa**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q3 (Japan) TBC (UK)**

The hip-hop hound is back, but it seems that the rapping Rover hasn't worked on his mad skillz in the time he was away, and could be overshadowed by newer crews



Critical successes are often hard for publishers to bear; they may create ground-level heroes, but they rarely create financially rewarding cultural icons. *PaRappa*'s colourful simplicity never brought the massmarket success Sony hoped for, and the release of an undersold follow-up, *Um Jammer Lammy*, in 1999 only compounded the widely perceived failure of rhythm action in the UK.

This is the sequel proper, Nana-on-Shaa choosing to discount *Um Jammer Lammy* as a side project rather than a full-on second adventure for their doggy superstar. Perhaps that's because some decried the '99 outing as a disappointment, a line of reasoning that's still difficult to understand. Laying down nonsensical rhymes with a laconic puppy might have been the original game's hook, and while it's true that the indie-ovine jamming didn't hold that same immediate appeal, PaRappa was there as an end-game backup for those disillusioned by Lammy's sweet self-conscious noodling, along with twoplayer co-operative and versus modes: what could possibly disappoint?



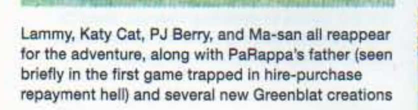
Kick, punch, you all remember: Chop Chop Master Onion's return will please fans of gaming's most popular vegetable-based karate instructor

Maybe the real letdown was the real lack of control evolution *Lammy* brought. *Cool Cool Toon* and *Gitarooman* (reviewed on p83) have both shown significant advancements can be made within the confines of the BeMani-inspired genre, so it's slightly concerning that *PaRappa*'s sequel, while successfully retaining the atmosphere of the first game, seems reluctant to push its own button-tapping concept much further.

The structure is simple and familiar. The player must match the rhythm displayed via a scrolling cartoon PaRappa head pinpointing the precise timing. This time round, the line also indicates the position of your presses, thus neatly illustrating the gap between your reactions and perfection. Fail two consecutive bars, and your ranking will slip, from Good, through Poor, to Bad. If the player consistently remains at good, the game becomes harder; if too many errors are made, the difficulty level is downgraded automatically to suit. Presumably *PaRappa* creator Matsaya Matsuura hopes this will see a sublime range of difficulty curves generated to suit all comers. Hopefully it won't serve to produce a weak-willed game that collapses apologetically before the player at the faintest sign that they're having trouble.

There's still no discernible evidence that *PaRappa*'s next-gen incarnation is achieving anything that couldn't be recreated on the PlayStation, but the original brought colour to Sony's last machine, and perhaps the hope is that *PaRappa 2* will do the same for PS2. Presuming SCEE sees fit to put *PaRappa* through its strict quarantining process, the hip-hip hero's cult credibility could still snowball.





Lammy, Katy Cat, PJ Berry, and Ma-san all reappear for the adventure, along with PaRappa's father (seen briefly in the first game trapped in hire-purchase repayment hell) and several new Greenblat creations







Rayman M

Format: PC/PlayStation2/XBox
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: In-house
Origin: France/Italy
Release: November 19

Ubi Soft's standard bearer jumps off his platform and into a racing game/deathmatch shooter hybrid, currently being developed by teams based in Paris and Milan

Successive releases of Ubi Soft's flagship franchise continue to be met with enormous approbation at retail across Europe. The publisher could easily be forgiven, then, for sticking to its tried-and-tested platform formula for the next instalment in the series, but it's indicative of a growing trend – also manifest in Nintendo's decision to show off its own enormous franchise potential with *Super Smash Bros Melee* at E3 – that *Rayman M* promotes a familiar franchise by using an existing character roster in a hitherto unfamiliar genre or blend of genres.

As the first true multiplayer *Rayman* episode, *Rayman M* comprises two elements: a deathmatch shooter and a platform racing game. Some 30 levels are planned, divided equally between these two, with tracks and arenas unlocked three at a time in a bid to manage the player's learning curve. Since both parts are being developed by separate Ubi Soft development teams, based in Paris and Milan, there is obviously some danger that the two components may not completely gel, but as **Florence Alibert**, managing director of Ubi Soft Italy attests, it allows the company's internal development teams to benefit from exchanging ideas: "As a *Rayman* title it's a very important project for Ubi Soft, and it was very important also because working with the French office we could gain lots of experience working on PlayStation2. There has been very good communication between the two teams, and it was very important to have this cultural exchange."

Perhaps tellingly, the racing game, developed by the more experienced French office, is the more immediately engaging aspect of *Rayman M*. Indeed it's strange that no other developer has hitherto allowed the platforming dynamic to inform the familiar kart racing formula to such an extent. In each of three racing modes, players guide their chosen character through multi-tiered courses populated with switches, slides, power-ups, and, of course, easter eggs. It's a beguiling blend, with an initially counterintuitive risk structure that proves fascinating in practice: stopping to hit a switch when careering at full momentum might not seem constructive while neck-and-neck with a fellow competitor, but it can prove advantageous. The blend isn't perfect – it's a shame that the characteristics of racers aren't more distinct, for example – but it's certainly fun.

Likewise, the deathmatch mode, although not apparently as polished, can prove to be immensely enjoyable – particularly a Lum collection mode in which competitors are equipped with a weapon that freezes other players in their tracks, lending a frantic party pace to the mix.

Ultimately, though, the proof will be in the target demographic pudding as to whether this adventurous foray proves as compelling as previous *Rayman* titles.

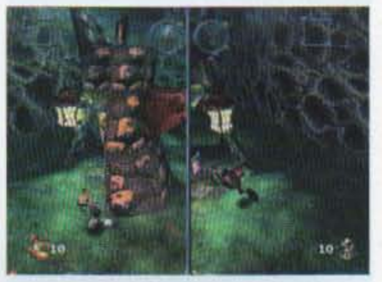


The environments and characters will be familiar to anyone who's played any of the previous titles



All of the arenas and multilayered tracks that have been shown so far feature a host of short cuts, long cuts, hidden areas and power-ups to add spice







There's a constant interplay between high-risk strategies that reap rewards in the shape of faster times, and more conservative routes which, though more circuitous, are correspondingly less punishing

Eschewing middleware

Rayman 2 is just one title among many that attest to a growing acceptance of the use of middleware by developers who, in the past, would have given the idea of using someone else's engine short shrift. Bucking this trend, though, Ubi Soft has decided to dispense with the use of Criterion's *RenderWare* technology for the development of *Rayman M*, simply because, thanks to the coding skills of its Chinese outpost, it can afford to. Thankfully, it's a decision that hasn't precipitated any discernible loss of quality.



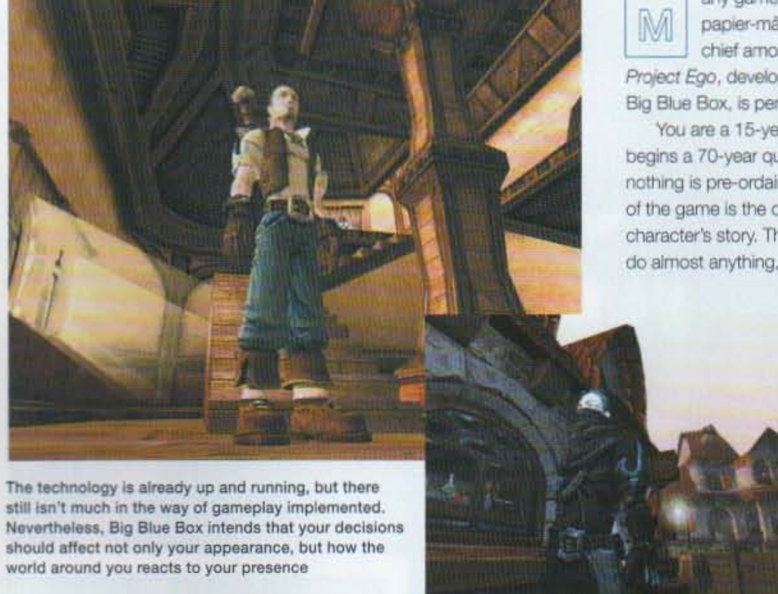
Project Ego

Format: XBo
Publisher: Microso
Developer: Big Blue Bo
Origin: U
Release: Q3 2002 (US) TBC (UK

Peter Molyneux is at it again, this time looking to develop a title with Big Blue Box that concerns a 15-year-old boy's 70-year quest to avenge his father. Sounds easy enough...







The technology is already up and running, but there still isn't much in the way of gameplay implemented. Nevertheless, Big Blue Box intends that your decisions should affect not only your appearance, but how the world around you reacts to your presence

Many game designers promise the moon and deliver papier-mâché moon rocks. Peter Molyneux is perhaps chief among those who can deliver on a crazy idea, and *Project Ego*, developed at a Lionhead Studios satellite company, Big Blue Box, is perhaps his craziest.

You are a 15-year-old whose family and dog have been killed. Here begins a 70-year quest for retribution and greatness in which absolutely nothing is pre-ordained until your character dies of old age. The final ac of the game is the opening of the history books where you read your character's story. This all takes place in a lavish 3D world where you car do almost anything, and everything you do changes that world. Attack a young boy, give him a scar, and when you come back 20 years later, he has the scar and a grudge. Go find the dragon and make him an ally, kill him, or ignore him – it's entirely based on how you choose to play your character, but every decision will affect your overall path.

Project Ego is very early in development, and is currently more technology than game. However, given the ambition of *Black & White* and what the team achieved in the finished product, it'll be interesting to see what Big Blue Box comes up with.

Dark Summit

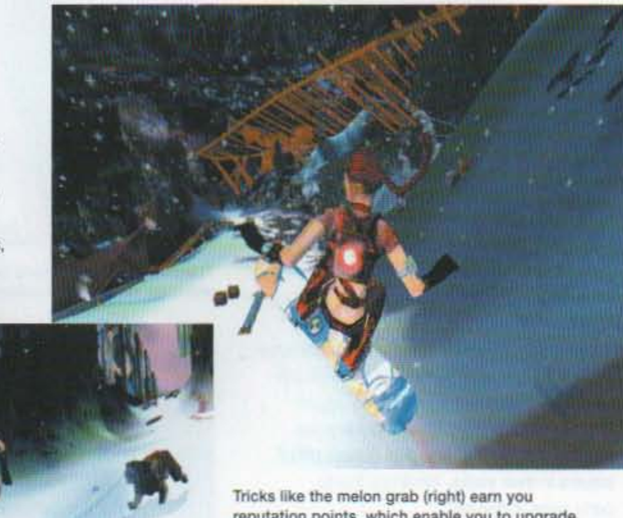
Format: PlayStation2, XBo
Publisher: THC
Developer: Radical Entertainmen
Origin: Canad
Release: Q3 (US) TBC (UK

How do you get a slacker's gander up? Why, shut her favourite snowboard run, dude. Radical sets out to overhaul the extreme sports genre by adding a little adventure

Radical Entertainment has decided that videogame snowboarding needs a boost. So, while you can do tricks as you make your way down the slopes of *Dark Summit*, the action isn't all about riding rails and doing flips – there are adventure and story elements incorporated into the gameplay.

Your task is to find out just why snowboard runs on Mount Garrick have been closed by shady ranger Chief O'Leary. As you speed down ski runs, you'll earn 'reputation points' for tricks that will enable hi-tech equipment upgrades. The big paydays, however, come when you complete missions, which include smashing signs, jumping helicopters, and escaping crazed forest rangers. If this conjures up images of 'meddling kids', it's not just a coincidence. "It's sort of a 'Scooby Doo' meets 'The X-Files' meets 'Apocalypse Now' type of script," says designer **Justin Sheffield**.

However, Radical first needs to solve the mystery of how to make the game enjoyable as well as unique. If the developer can introduce the adventure aspects without sacrificing the snowboard gameplay, players may come away from the game with a sense of "mystery and intrigue" that Sheffield is shooting for, "combined with speed, exhilaration, and just plain awe."



Tricks like the melon grab (right) earn you reputation points, which enable you to upgrade your snowboarding kit, but while stunting is fun, *Dark Summit* is primarily built around its storyline. There is an edgy feel to the environments, and NPCs play a key role in attempting to thwart your progress





TOCA Race Driver

Format: **PlayStation2/various**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **2002**

Codemasters returns to the track, but is it dragging the racing genre to its logical evolutionary conclusion? Well, it's certainly a lot closer than most of its competitors







Fords, Lotuses, and TVRs at the A1-Ring in Austria. This first batch of shots is indicative of the visual enhancement you can expect over previous *TOCA* titles. The game aims to continue the work already partially started in *TOCA WTC*, proposing a far more personal approach to the world of videogame racing

Codemasters' wonderbrand returns for its first next-gen outing. Early indications are reassuring. Rather than a straight racing affair with prettier graphics, the 45-strong team has worked hard to add a novel element to the series. The obvious route – the one understandably taken by Codemasters – is to develop a player's personal experience with the game. As such, a character-based and episodic narrative is placed within authentic global championship series as you progress from test driver status to world champion (*Race Driver* continues the international feel of *WTC*, with the rights for the British Touring Car Championship, Germany's DTM Championship, and Australia's AVESCO V8 Supercar Shell Championship Series obtained by Codemasters). Both on- and off-circuit developments form part of the game.

In another twist, the game promises to do away with features such as frontend and option screens, for instance, in an attempt at removing obstacles that may otherwise prove obstructive to drawing the player in to the action.

Expect the game to continue the series' highly competitive racing, with (according to its maker) significant improvements in physics modelling, AI, and an enhanced and expansive damage system.

Devil May Cry

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **August 23 (Japan) December (UK)**

Capcom's demonic creation returns in tweaked demo fashion. Fear not, the main game components that proved so appealing have thankfully survived the transition intact

Devil May Cry's latest demo iteration (which is included with copies of *Resident Evil Code: Veronica X*, released on September 7) has unveiled some significant changes facing Dante, the half-devil, evil-fighting prodigy.

The game's structure has altered so that the action is now mission based. The two offered in the demo are a little on the brief side but the finished version purportedly offers far more substantial undertakings per mission for all willing Dante incarnates (the total mission number remains undisclosed at this point).

Also, whereas before 'souls' (red orbs) from defeated enemies needed collecting before doors would open (a feature **Edge** wasn't too keen on, however traditional it might have been), these can now be exchanged at certain points for weapon power-ups and continues, etc. Furthermore, rather than allow Dante to fly around the screen igniting his enemies with lightning blasts as soon as he turns into his demonic state (as in the first demo), defying gravity and generating electricity are now two features that need to be acquired by trading a number of red orbs.

Other than that, you'll be glad to know the gameplay remains as compelling as before. Definitely a title to watch.



Disposing of enemies rewards you with orbs (red, which can be exchanged for goods – see text – and green, which replenish your energy). But in an interesting alteration to the original demo, the manner in which you dispatch your opponents determines the amount of orbs you obtain. The 'cooler' your digital execution method is, the better the resulting reward









Falcone: Into The Maelstrom

Two years ago Point Blank had a vision that it believed would make the world sit up and take notice. Since then the team has been working to bring it to fruition, and now it seems someone else had the same idea. Edge investigates

When the prescreen focuses for **E**101 are finalised, a previously unseen coincidence pans out across the issue flatplan. It seems fate's playing games, and the results could be interesting.

A week later at Virgin's HQ in the café-heavy backstreets of central London, development virgin Point Blank is talking **Edge** through its 18-month-old project. The team's emphasis is on the title's individuality, on its position as forerunners developing a game genre crossbreed. At first it seems there's a point to be made here. *Falcone: Into The Maelstrom* sounds like it might be something unique, a blend of arcade-space dogfighting and firstperson gunplay wrapped in '2000AD'-inspired sci-fi-philia. Or it would do, but for that accursed twist of fate and the dark-burning star of the six-page *Bounty Hunter* feature that follows this one. And, while **Edge** hasn't seen the Warthog title yet – that trip is scheduled for later in this issue's genesis – it's clear the two titles are strikingly similar.

Which isn't necessarily a bad thing, of course – competition rarely is – but still, it's slightly unfortunate for both teams involved that two years ago they drew out identical plans for a solitary assault on videogaming's next generation. That duplicated idea: to offer potential space cowboys the chance to exit their ships and dash around enemy structures, seamlessly mixing an FPS with a purebred deep-space arcade shooter. Point Blank's concept plays by the comic book, casting the player as a loveable rogue in a universe created and scripted by



'2000AD' readers will be familiar with *Maelstrom*'s tongue-in-cheek take on sci-fi. Murray's art stylishly brings Morrison's creations into three dimensions







Format: **XBox/PS2**
Publisher: **Virgin**
Developer: **Point Blank**
Release: **Q4 (US) TBC (UK)**
Origin: **UK**

Photography: **Martin Thompson**



Maelstrom's motherships are massive, and, while hangar bays will provide access most of the time, sometimes the player's entrances will have to be a little more creative. By ramming his ship hard against the target's hull at predetermined points, Falcone can punch his way in and get thieving







Falcone: Into The Maelstrom's space combat shies away from lasers and super-shiny technology, preferring chain guns and scratched metal. As well as contributing to cynical futurism that pervades the space opera, the use of FPS-style weapons also helps blend the two parts of the game

'2000AD' stalwart Robbie Morrison. Lead designer **Damian Hosen** explains: "The player plays a space pirate called Gabriel Falcone, and you've got 20 levels, each of which has different objectives – maybe get a certain character to this point, do this, and come back out again. But as a subtext to every level, because you're a space pirate you're a thief, and you have to break aboard and steal booty. Booty's stored in various places around the level, and you've got to find, say, 60 per cent of the total. The more you collect, the more your notoriety as a pirate increases, and the more things become available to you. So it has a console-style scoring to it as well."

Console styling

Despite previews in the PC gaming press, the team presses the point that *Falcone*, is, was, and always will be a console game. Perhaps that's because Microsoft, increasingly intrigued by the title's progress, is visiting today. Later, senior producer **Tom Gillo** will disappear to demonstrate some of the game's strengths to its rich American uncle. For now, he sits patiently, nervous while Hosen continues to take **Edge** through the team's beliefs: "We've been spending a lot of time and attention on the game world and bringing a sort of console styling the project, to make it really… thick. We never designed it as a PC title – we've always been going for a console control method. Character styles, tempo, weapons – it's all for that sort of market. So there won't be a lot of difficult up and down looking motions, because that's so difficult on a pad. All the level design has to fit nicely around a console input system."

"The look is very console, and that was key. We wanted to get away from the traditional firstperson palettes, the greys, and make it very colourful and vibrant"

Since they're so intent on making it clear that *Into The Maelstrom*'s destiny lies in the realm of TVs and joypads rather than keyboards and mice, what's the difference between developing a game like this for the PC and for next-gen consoles?

"Firstly, the singleplayer mode is far more important in a console game. I mean, *Half-Life* has redefined PC stuff, but we really wanted to make it…" Hosen's enthusiasm for this line of thought wanes, and he switches tack. "I mean, the look for it is very console, and that was key. We wanted to get away from the traditional firstperson palettes, the greys, and make it very colourful and vibrant." He nods towards **Matt Butler**, the creative director, who, like the rest of those present, spends much of the interview waiting for Hosen to finish his sentences.

"You also have a slightly younger market," continues Hosen, "and you have to presume they're a less hardcore FPS market. So you make it more accessible earlier in the game, and maybe have more character development, like *Metal Gear Solid*. And, from a design point of view, the control system is the key thing. You've got to make sure the levels are designed around the pad, rather than designed around a mouse and then finding it's too difficult with a pad. Those are the issues: accessibility and style."

Gillo sees his opportunity and picks up: "The pace of the game as well. Obviously there's the control – it's something we're going to refine throughout the development, exactly how you interact with the character and spaceships. It's quite a challenge for us to get it so the gameplay both exterior and interior feels right on a pad. Currently we're moving our development over to the title platforms, and we're in the embryonic stages of doing that, and thinking about how we're going to be able to control this."

There's an awkward pause, as if the team is trying to illustrate to **Edge** exactly how hard they've been thinking about it. Hosen's willing to break the silence: "The key thing is keeping the continuity between the two sections on the pad. Because the two game modes are seamless, because there's no loading times – when you board a ship, you're in the ship – it's got to work consistently between the two. And that's the biggest challenge."

Comicbook looks

The other thing the developer stresses is the way the recruitment of comicbook artist Jim Murray to a permanent position on the Point Blank team has impacted on the game. Butler explains: "We went to Forbidden Planet, and we were looking for concepts. The only thing we came back with was Batman and Demon, and it was by Jim Murray. And then the next week his CV arrived."

The team giggles. Fate playing games again. Hosen continues: "He's got a really stylised modern comic view, and we really wanted to… well, we



Richie Turner
lead programmer

Damian Hosen
lead designer

Matt Butler
creative director









Dramatic space vistas outside the windows are pretty enough, but gain new import when a space battle rages outside. Point Blank promises mounted guns that will allow ground-based players to involve themselves in the arcade-modelled vacuum combat





gave him a brief insofar as we wanted this futuristic robot-style stuff." He pauses, and glances around at the fantastical pencil sketches that adorn the sterile office walls. "And pirates," he adds thoughtfully, grins and continues. "We didn't want the robots to be grey, tanned, bland. We wanted really colourful, vibrant, console-style characters in a firstperson game, which really hasn't been done before. We figured with the power of the hardware we've got now we can realise that."

And, judging by the startling similarity between Murray's initial sketches and the in-game models, the team presumably believes that's been achieved.

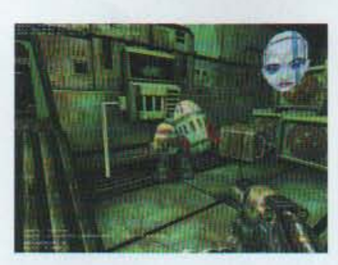
"We've managed to keep the integrity from the 2D characters and bring it into 3D without the need for cel-shading," says Hosen. "If you look at the concept work next to the models, you'll see that it's really bang on. And to see them moving is fantastic, and it's fantastic for Jim as well, of course, because he's always just worked in 2D, and all of a sudden his characters are moving around and speaking."

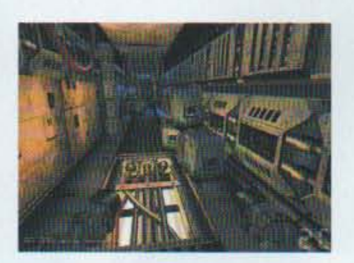
Edge is shown a showreel of one of the characters, the Moskets. They're the lowest drone in the robot army, curled up in hibernating balls, and clinging dormant to the ceiling. When they're awoken they unfurl and drop to the floor, their AI state visible in the colour of their eyes – a touch inspired by the soldiers' alert marks in *Metal Gear Solid*. The robots pace the ship's corridors like Raptors, and despite (or perhaps because of) Point Blank's decision not to use motion capture for the character animation, there's a threatening realism to their movement. If the player wishes, they can shoot the steel reptilian apart at the joints, stealing its chain gun to add insult to mecha-injury.

Also impressive are the team's plans for multiplayer (Hosen again: "We could do a level based around a big ship, and all the players start outside, have to get in, get the booty, and get out. We've also got standard deathmatch firstperson, a standard *Star Fox* dogfighting thing, and then there's the Last Man Standing game where all the pirates start in an arena"), something conspicuous by its absence in its soon-to-be rival.

"It comes from designing something that people want to play," the vociferous designer says, plainly. "I'm not going to be patronising and snobby and say, 'This is really clever, people won't understand it' because they will. They really will. They'll get the plot, they'll get the characters, they'll enjoy themselves, and that beats everything."

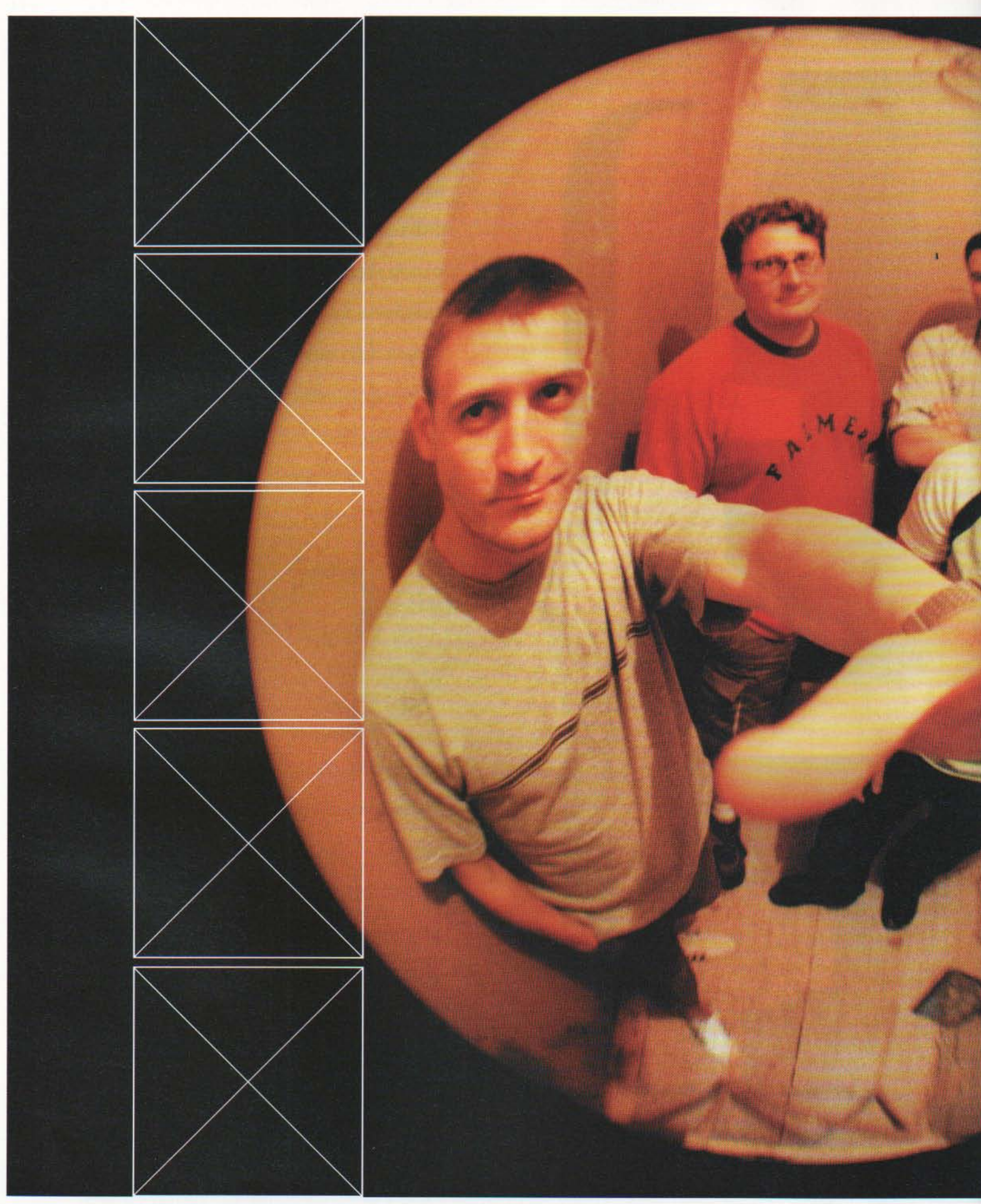
Simple words, stated with quiet confidence. Point Blank's ideals are convincing, and, were their plan unique, the team's impressive self-belief alone might be enough to make *Into The Maelstrom* a certain success. But fate hates certainties, and that's where things get interesting...

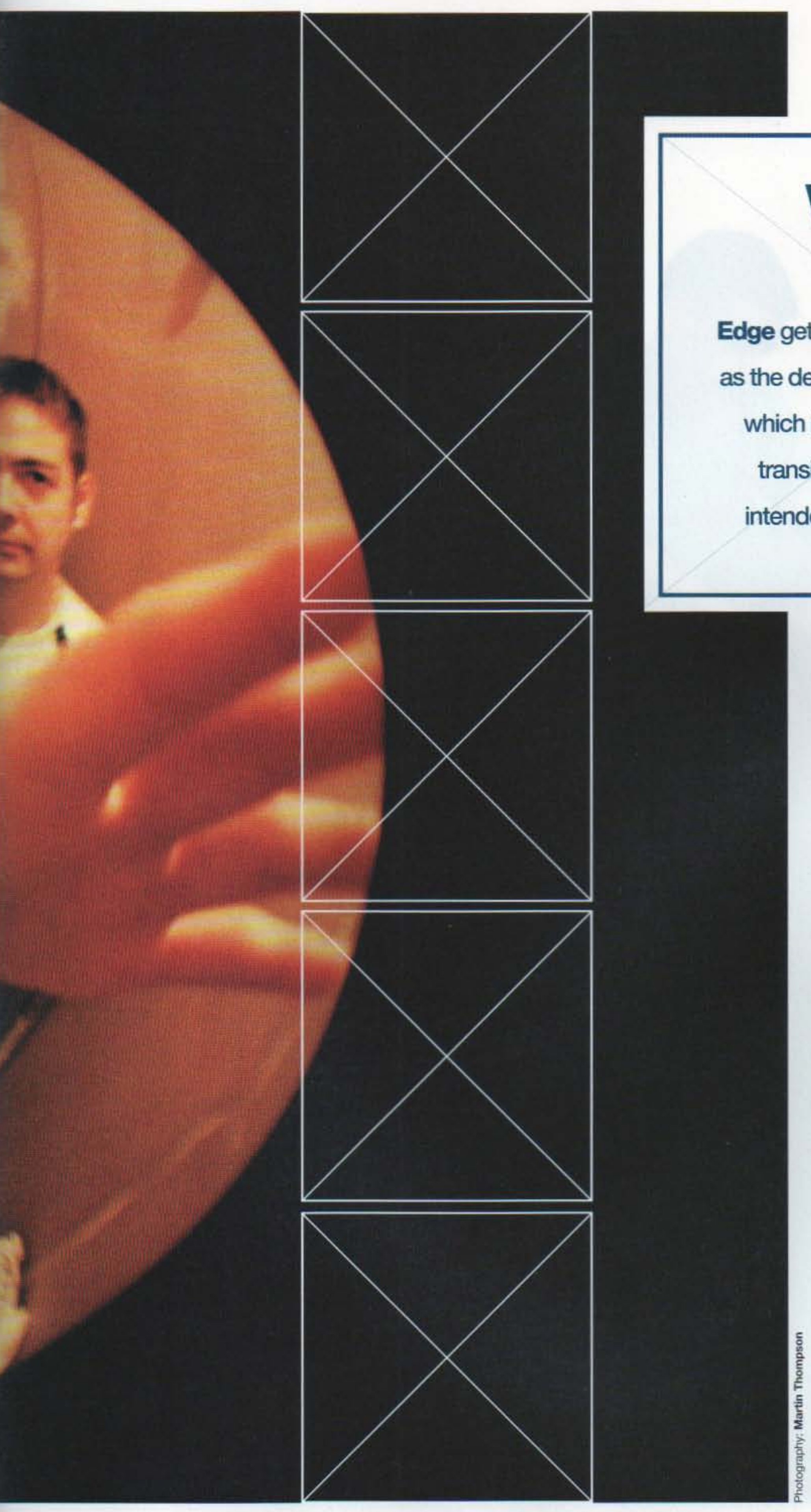




Players will receive advice throughout each mission, dispensed via avatars in the top-right-hand corner of the screen. Here, Falcone must act as bodyguard for a chubby suicidal colleague







Photography: **Martin Thompson**

Inside…

Warthog

Edge gets that Groundhog feeling at Warthog as the developer outlines its forthcoming title, which is set in space, involves 'seamless transitions' from ship to station, and is intended to take *Elite* on to the next level

This is where things get interesting. Two weeks after the *Maelstrom* trip, **Edge** travels to Cheadle, South Manchester, and the redeveloped factory building Warthog has made its own. Perhaps that's the wrong tense: half the place looks like an office block, and half looks like a building site.

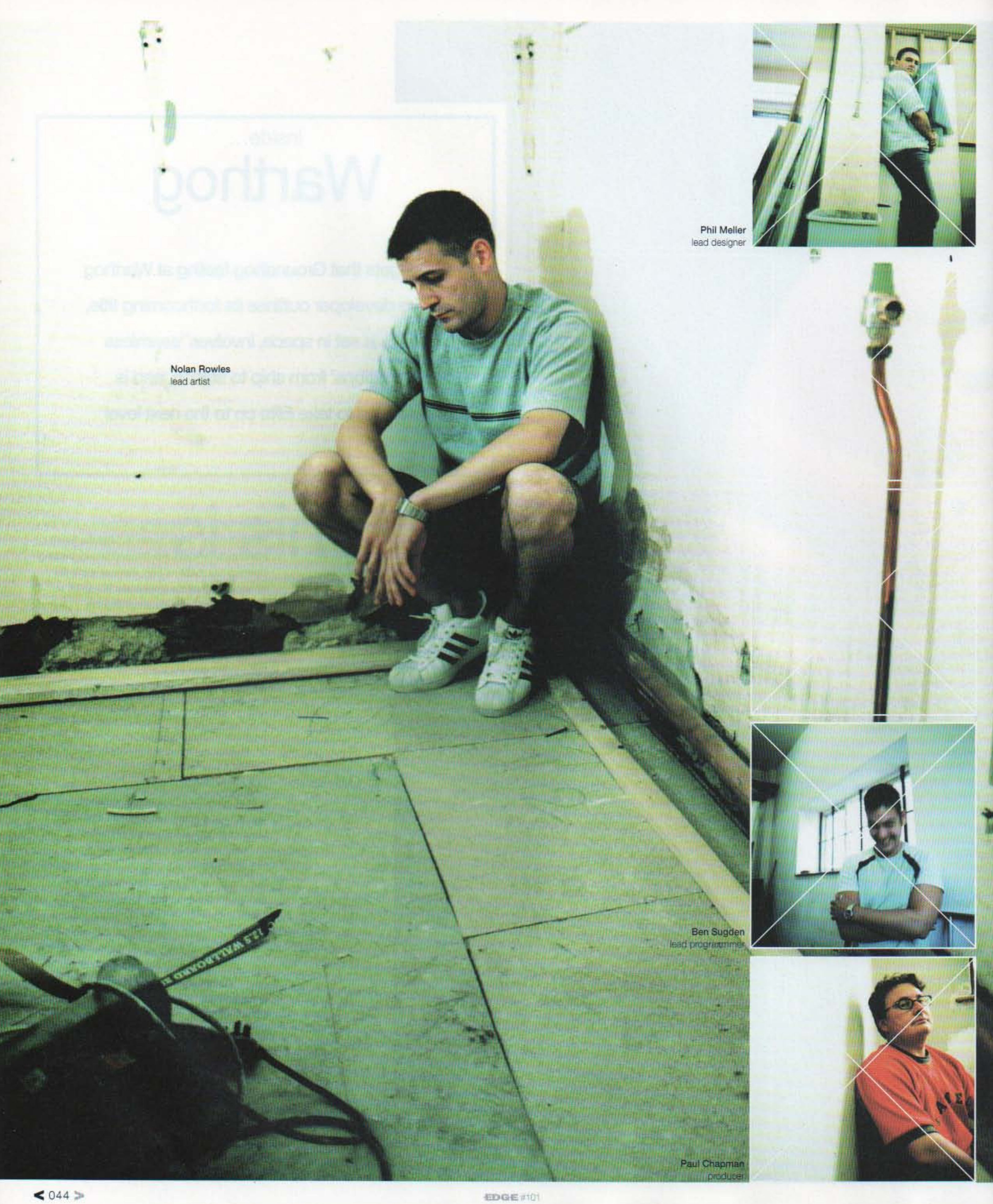
"That's where the stairwell will be," Bounty Hunter producer **Paul Chapman** says, absent-mindedly motioning towards a disconcerting three-storey hole. He leads **Edge** through the maze of white sheets and paint-spattered ladders towards the less chaotic confines of the *Bounty Hunter* team, where he's shortly to inflict a very predictable case of déjà-vu.

He sets the playable demo running, and **Edge** waits for impact. Three, two, one… "The main concept of the game is a firstperson shooter, ground based, with a seamless transition into space." Bang. There it is. A game eerily reminiscent of Point Blank's effort (see p34).

"You start out as a futuristic lawman, special ops, in a galaxy that's been inhabited by both the human race and a couple of other alien races, and there's almost a kind of land rush, like the 1800s in America. You and your unit go to investigate a ship being hijacked. You get involved, your unit gets wiped out, you're the sole survivor, and you get framed for the death of your unit, and chucked in prison for ten years." Chapman flies his spaceship past a glass-walled section of a massive space cruiser, and tiny aliens mill around inside. Cute touch.

"The game starts proper when you get out – although you do get involved in the first section. That'll be very basic combat, limited weapons, running around shooting people, and a bit of transition between that and the space combat."

As he continues to talk through the story, Chapman flies his ship into a docking bay and sets it to land. As it drops, he spins his character round and jumps out of the descending craft,

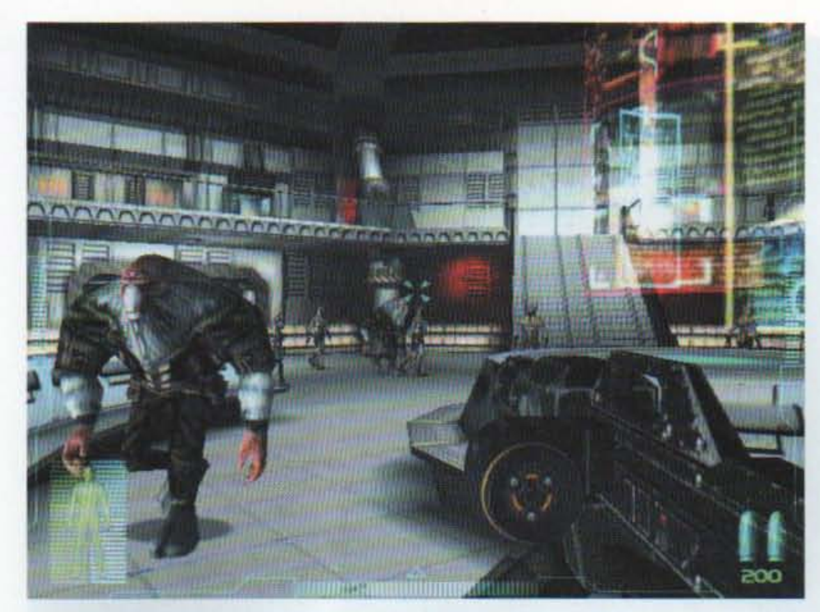


Nolan Rowles
lead artist

Phil Meller
lead designer

Ben Sugden
lead programmer

Paul Chapman
producer







Bounty Hunter's spacestation is heavily bump-mapped and packed with seedy alien visitors. One of the passages leading off the hub contains a room full of pole dancers, while another leads to your briefing room

nimbly slipping between genres. It's...

"It's totally seamless," Chapman says, kindly providing a neat example of what's fast becoming **Edge**'s word of the month. "What's quite unique about the technology is that we have the interior levels existing at the same time as the exterior. So in the game you'll have a sniper mode in the ship, and you'll be able to take out people on the ground. And vice versa – you'll be down on the ground and you'll be able to shoot out the ships, or the guys who are in the cockpits in the ships. Missions have been designed to utilise that as much as possible."

"What's quite unique about the technology is that we have the interior levels existing at the same time as the exterior"

Improving on *Elite*

After a brief tour around the debris-strewn codeshop, the *Bounty Hunter* development team chats about its baby. Lead artist **Nolan Rowles** remembers the conception: "It's kind of like a wish-list thing, isn't it? It's not something I've seen done before, but it's something I've always been quite keen to do. *Elite* – I loved that game, but the one thing I wished I could do was get out on the space stations and wander around, strike up deals and stuff."

Everyone nods. It's a common geek fantasy, and one the *Maelstrom* team also quoted as an inspiration. But Warthog's take on the dream seems somewhat less stylised than Point Blank's – still comicbook, but more understated. Rowles continues: "We want the realism factor, but we want to populate the world with more... well, I wouldn't say comicbook characters, but we're not going for total realism. More a sort of witty realism."

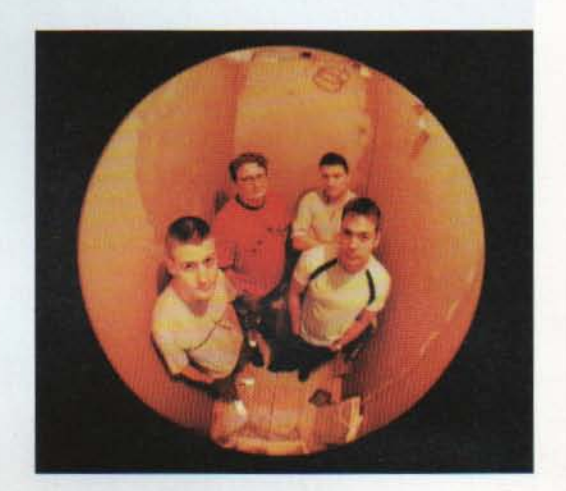
Chapman elucidates: "We're tipping our hats to the grittiness of a sort of Sergio Leone feel. Without put spurs and cowboy hats on everybody. It's not as literal as that."

Which, presumably, means the cowboy wandering around the game's hub will shortly disappear. Nowles nods: "Yeah, but we've got that same sort of frontier-town look."

That hub, seen running on an old-style XBox silver tower dev kit, is a heavily populated space station where the lead character will receive his

FAQ

Company name: Warthog
Founded: 1997
HQ: Cheadle, Cheshire
Number of employees: 80
Selected softography: *Starlancer* (PC, DC); *Star Trek Invasion* (PS); *Asterix: The Gallic War* (PS, PC); *Tom & Jerry* (PS, GBC)
Projects in development: *Pirate Island* (WAP); *Rally Xtreme* (PC); *Bounty Hunter* (Xbox); *Tiny Toons Wacky Stackers* (GBA); *Tiny Toons Buster's Challenge* (GBC)











Being able to step outside the fighter gives the player a sense of scale, and a chance to examine the scratches on their space fighter close up









The *Bounty Hunter* team admits that much of the inspiration behind the game came from Boba Fett. What hive of scum and villainy would be complete without alien-infested dark alleys and a neon motel?

"To be honest, the Xbox is absolutely outstanding. The graphics capability, the whole architecture – it's absolutely fantastic"

missions. The number of people wandering around is impressive. Lead programmer **Ben Sugden** explains: "One of the things we're doing a lot of is a really great density of people in our environments. I don't know if you've seen the Xbox demo we've got, but we've got like 30-40 people kicking around in a room. It's gonna be a big…" – Sugden cringes a little – "frag fest, if you can call it that. Which people aren't really doing."

All of a sudden the producer's behind the sight of a theoretical chaingun, mowing down everyone in the room with imaginary bullets. Sugden picks up: "You can imagine that, can't you, just flying through the hangar picking people off in your ship, taking pot shots."

He joins in Chapman's actions, and **Phil Meller**, the project's lead designer, nods enthusiastically: "Yeah, it's just like a big action movie. It's full on. Like 'True Lies', when he's in the Harrier, just laying waste."

Genre crossbreed

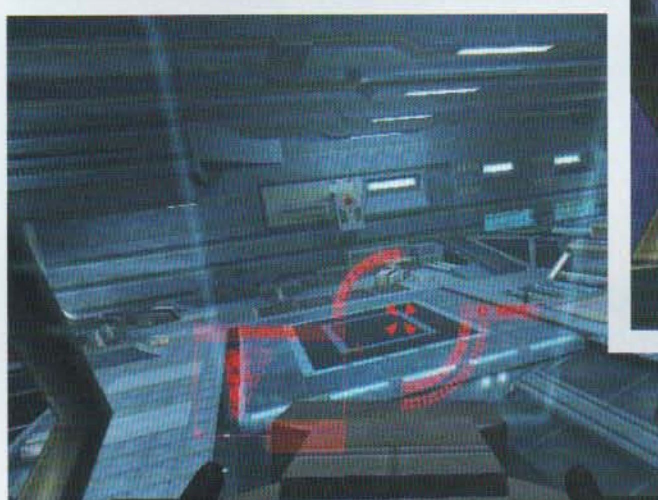
So, if you're crossbreeding two genres, are you really doing something new? What's the player going to find in *Bounty Hunter* that they won't in, say, an FPS/space shooter budget compilation?

Chapman's response is cautious: "We're aware that maybe we have got something new to offer, but I don't think it's wise to deviate too much from proven core gameplay things that people have enjoyed. Arguably the FPS is one of the most popular genres there is, and you have to be aware of why that is."

But failure to advance means stagnation.

"The thing about it, I think, is to implement a lot of variety. And what we've got is a very strong storyline, a very big diversification of missions, whether it be distributing data or




Once your vehicle is safely inside the safe and welcoming atmosphere of a docking bay, the player can take advantage of the ship's destructive ammunition-based weaponry. Equally, they're free to land their vehicle, disembark and continue their campaign of terror on foot

blowing up an installation, or going in and rescuing somebody. And the storyline, and a lot of changes in pace – from out-and-out carnage to stealth and things like that."

Why is the game PC and Xbox only? Sugden's quick to answer: "Because PS2 isn't capable of doing what we want to do. You absolutely need a hard drive – you're streaming so much data. The levels are complex, really detailed. The rendering techniques we're using, there's no way you could do them on a PS2."

"There's also texture memory considerations as well, isn't there?" adds Keller. "You want quite a lot of variety, and you'd struggle on PS2."

So, has Microsoft's console has satisfied the team's expectations, technically?

"To be honest, the Xbox is absolutely outstanding," sighs Sugden, contentedly. "The graphics capability, the whole architecture – it's absolutely fantastic, as far as I'm concerned. It's just a leap forward from everything else that's gone before it. Some of the graphics effects that we're able to do blow your mind."

"I think it's important to maintain beautiful things you do visually, and what impact that has on the game," confirms Chapman. "Because obviously, the more passes you take, the more things you've got to cut back on."

Sugden concurs: "There's a different philosophy coming from the XBox development community, which is rather than do more polys, do more with the polys."

The sentence tastes of morale-boosting poster philosophy. The sentence tastes American, tastes of Xbox. So what has Warthog done with those polys that's going to amaze Allard et al? "The engine we've written is really pushing the boundaries of what can be done and what has been done so far," maintains Sugden. "As far as I'm aware, there's nothing that gives you that size of environment where you can fly around in space, land on a ship, get out, wander round, and still have centimetre, millimetre interactions with objects. I've not seen that anywhere."

Nowhere? Meller glances at the others. "There are people who are working on games that are... similar," he says.

"I think Virgin are doing a game called *Maelstrom*. I've seen something on that, somewhere," adds Chapman, cautiously. There's an awkward pause, and everyone looks at their feet. Meller glances up: "Have you guys?"

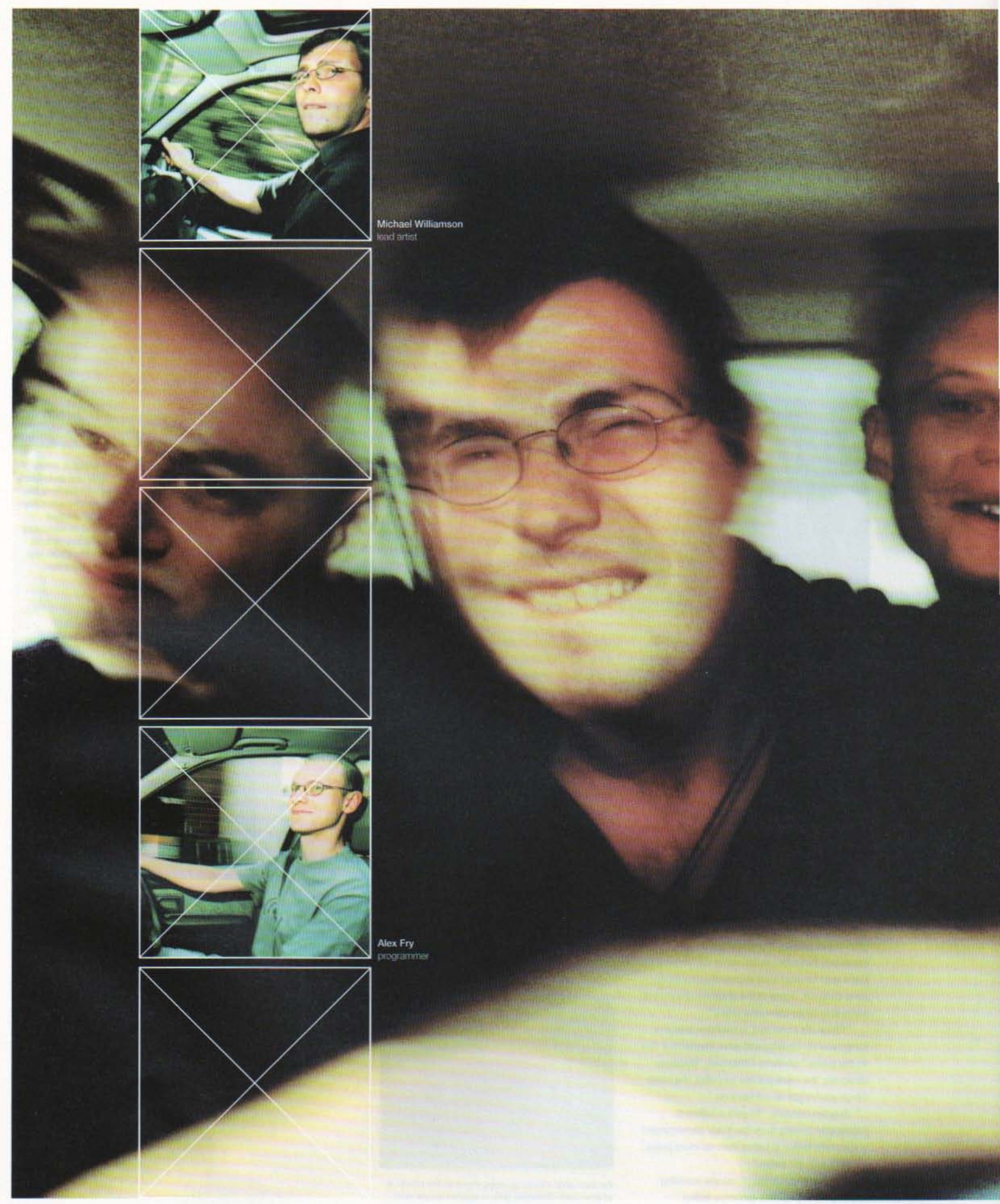
Maybe.



An alien pole dancer gyrates, much to the pleasure of your hero. Shooting girls is against house rules




The techno-heavy and lighting-light atmosphere of the FPS sections will be familiar to most PC gamers, but Warthog promises a crate count of 'almost zero'


Michael Williamson
lead artist

Alex Fry
programmer

Inside...

Criterion Games

Two games. That's all it's taken Criterion to alter its image, emerging from tech-led haven as a player seriously keen on joining the development elite. Edge caught up with the Canon-owned codeshop at its Guildford HQ to find out more

You know Criterion. At least, you think you do. Criterion has changed. Of course, there is still Criterion the *RenderWare* company, continuously working to improve development tools for the world's leading gaming platforms. But the electronic entertainment side of the equation, Criterion Games, has dramatically altered. The right people have been employed, a number have left. More importantly, the appropriate games have entered development. Which is why **Edge** is here.

Burning rubber

Perhaps the most exciting racing title to have materialised over the last couple of years, *Burnout* (formerly *SRC*, and one of two impressive offerings **Edge** will see this afternoon) is a genuinely compelling prospect. It's a little bit of *OutRun*, a lot of *Thrill Drive*, and partly inspired by the dramatic chase sequences from 'Ronin' and 'The French Connection'. It's unashamedly fast and frantic. But it's possibly also the spiritual successor to 3DO *Need For Speed*, one of the greatest racers of all time. Clearly *Burnout* has a way to go before a similarly prestigious accolade can be bestowed upon it, but already signs are positive. Take the technology, for instance – definite second-generation PS2 terrain.

"I have not seen too many developers pushing the PS2 quite as well as we are," boasts **Alex Fry**, one of the three *Burnout* programmers. "Most games seem to have questionable framerates or low-res textures."

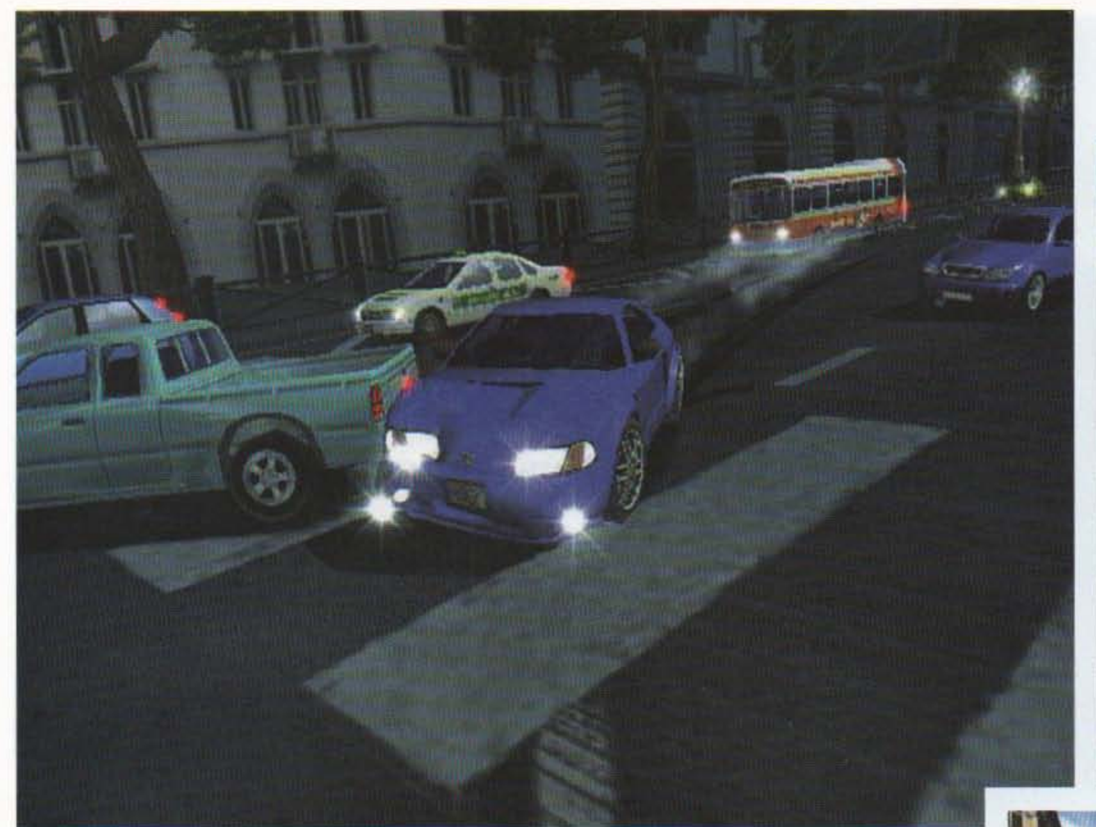
Burnout, by contrast, features some of the most graphically rich racing environments yet seen on Sony's black box. Some of the busiest, too. A ridiculous number of polygons are imbued with traditional coin-op hues and skilled use of textures, lending the game the look of a solid coin-op racer and certainly placing it far higher up the aesthetic grid than the positions secured by the PC-esque appearance of



Richard Parr lead programmer

Chris Roberts game designer

Photography: **Martin Thompson**





It may not seem like much, but *Burnout* without traffic would be just another racing game. With it, however, it's easily the most refreshing racing game to have emerged from any studio of late. The trick is making it react intelligently





No licence? No problem. In *Burnout*, cars involved in accidents get suitably damaged. Quick, instant replays are activated every time you've got too close to other vehicles (above) without interrupting the flow of play. The audio is heavily tied into the game's physics so that the components of the car engine have been broken down and are treated differently depending on the gear selected, the pressure on the accelerator button, and how much load there is on the car. Collision effects are dynamically generated and dependent on the type of materials your car is crashing against



the majority of PS2 titles so far.

"We're pleased with the way we render our trees and lampposts, since we can place a huge amount of geometry around the world for a very small memory footprint and basically zero CPU overhead, which is nice since we can make the world really busy," explains Fry.

"[The worlds are] using a generic renderer but are sorted correctly so that they render in the greatest possible manner," he continues, revealing that the team has written a variety of tools to analyse the artwork for rendering speed efficiency. "We have an offline toolchain that takes the worlds, cars, game data, and sorts it into the best possible arrangement and then compiles it into a format that's both fast and easy to load, and enables us to transparently pull in new parts of the world as needed with no hit to performance. As you can see, the draw distance is impressive, with zero pop-up."

And it's not doing badly in terms of content, either. This is checkpoint-based racing taking place on North American freeways complete with hazardous tunnels, the treacherous apexes of Europe, and the (as yet undisclosed) roads of the Far East. Though usually organised into three courses per geographical area, with laps



constituting the event, on two occasions the trio are linked together to form a marathon stage, with the team currently undecided whether the resulting seven-minute run should constitute a lap of a longer race or a single A-to-B affair.

Terrific traffic

What makes *Burnout* stand above the current competition, however, isn't its content, which so far may appear quite generic. Rather, it is the game's inclusion of civilian traffic. It's a seemingly straightforward addition, but one that alters the game so radically that you have to wonder why it isn't done more often.

"The traffic system is actually quite unique, I don't think we've seen a game which has a system quite like it," says **Hamish Young**, another Criterion employee, in charge of *Burnout*'s AI. "On average we're updating about 300 cars a frame but actually on the larger tracks you go past something like a thousand to 1,500 cars a lap, which



is quite a large amount of traffic."

But it's not just the number of vehicles that is significant. Sure, busy freeways and crammed Parisian-esque riverside expressways do much to form the foundations for a believable, reality-echoing environment, but it's the behavioural responses of these other road users that really make this automotive illusion work.

"The traffic cars all do things like body roll, they all steer, they all turn realistically – if you stop in the middle of the road they'll go round and overtake you," says Young. "We have real traffic lights, the cars indicate when changing lanes, all the cars have headlights, brake lights and indicators – much like real cars."

They also have horns. But that's okay, because you get to use one, too. Some drivers react to it, jumbling the traffic (always an unnerving situation when you're travelling at triple figures), some may not.

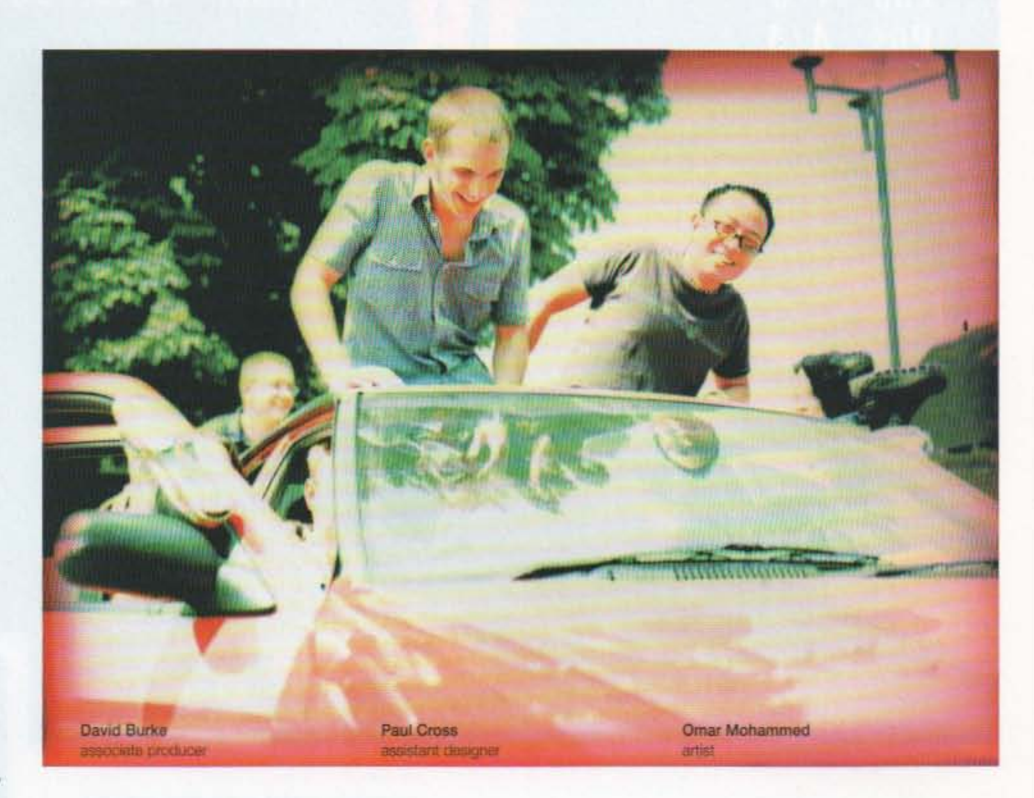
"Avoidance is based on risk," explains Young. "It's basically a model of risk assessment, so if you've got a low risk, [the car] will just go towards the target, but if it's got a high risk, it will do everything it can to get out of the way. If you see in certain places where you've got a crash and cars are coming through, they'll slow down and try to weave their way through the crash, because they can stop in time. But they don't really care about where they're going in the long term and will just do what they can to get out of the way."

Some vehicles that are most definitely interested in where they're going long term are the three CPU opponents you race against while also dodging in and out of the numerous commuters. And although the developer has purposefully refrained from giving opponents distinct personalities, certain aggressivity parameters can be tweaked.

"We're giving the game designers full control of the variables they can alter in the game editor at certain stages around the track," explains **Stu McKenna**, *Burnout*'s other AI specialist. "Say, for example, on the last lap they can make them very, very competitive, and a lot harder to race. But also, of course, you can get them to drive on the wrong side of the road into oncoming traffic, which really does mess you up if you're trying to do the same because the cars are swerving out of the way, which makes it all very, very hectic."

To balance things out a little, not all of the traffic is random. Game designer **Chris Roberts** explains: "If it's a realistic traffic system with all these cars driving round, you've got no way of learning it, you've got no way of getting better at the game because there's no way of figuring out what's happening next, which is not an arcade game. We want to make an arcade game which people can play, pick up and improve at."

So, while the traffic is different every lap, at certain sections throughout the courses the team has included 'hot spots', which are patterns (such as a series of lorries forming a moving slalom) that can be learned, like corners. Similarly, traffic at crossroads is triggered



David Burke
associate producer

Paul Cross
assistant designer

Omar Mohammed
artist

by your vehicle going past a certain point, deliberately setting up near-miss situations.

If this sounds a little too artificial, it isn't, because in practice you don't notice it. What you do notice is how remarkably exciting it is to play. The gameplay's risk/reward structure is convincingly balanced, the combination of time checkpoints and race opponents leaving you no option but to engage in daring automotive conduct at ridiculous velocities. And to further enhance matters, a boost function has been included – your driver's heartbeat is monitored (the more dangerous the driving, such as speeding contraflow, the higher the heart rate), and once a certain level is reached, you're free to use the boost at your own risk. Doing this will significantly increase the chances of experiencing the game's wonderful near misses in action. Although similarities to real models are apparent, none of the vehicles are licensed, and as such Criterion hasn't shied away from portraying collisions. Fans of 3DO *Need For Speed* will understand the importance of accurately depicting such incidents, and *Burnout* does this better than most with its vehicles seemingly aware of the purpose of crumple zones.

All of the above elements are ably supported by the handling model. Predictably arcade-inspired and lacking some of the subtlety of something like *Gran Turismo*, it suits the gameplay perfectly. It's immediate, instinctive, and predictable. Not unlike your vehicle's powersliding ability (to encourage drivers to push the back end out, a little drift meter records distances spent in a sideways stance – a simple but effective competition-enhancing touch).

Admittedly, taken apart, *Burnout* may not





Ten vehicles (based on real-life models, including a fire engine), along with three of the 16 courses, are initially selectable. The scoring system is based on near misses, time spent driving against oncoming traffic, drifting distances, and speeds travelled at. Conversely, a 'bad driver' score is also calculated – cars in *Burnout* have insurance values attached to them, and after a crash a collateral damage value is assessed. In addition to the Championship mode (four grand prix consisting of three to five courses raced in order), and Duel/Head To Head/Time Trial options, Survival times your ability to drive through traffic before crashing (checkpoints remain in place to ensure silly speeds are maintained)

















Splitscreen twoplayer *Burnout* divides the constant 60fps framerate of the oneplayer game by two, and the team currently hopes to also include potentially great two- and fourplayer iLink modes

sound like much. There's nothing particularly revolutionary about it, but it's the combination of these components that makes it such an attractive proposition. The easy-going yet dependable handling, the arcade-style colourful visuals, the striking 'real life' behavioural quality and density of the traffic, the determination of your opponents, and the sheer thrill of the action makes this one of the most engrossing, entertaining and replayable racing titles **Edge** has encountered. Initial fears that it could perhaps suffer from a certain shallowness when placed alongside the competition have been mostly eradicated. What this title may appear to lack in substance, it more than promises to make up for in terms of player involvement and addictive quality. It's uncomplicated and direct, but the playability level is already high. Let's hope it remains that way until its November 2 release.

Getting big air

Not content with one potential hit, a second Criterion Games team has been busy developing another. *AirBlade* comes to you from some of the people responsible for the distinguished *TrickStyle* (released on DC/PC). It's the story of a genius skateboarder who comes up with some astonishing technology that powers up the AirBlade, a hover board. He subsequently gets in trouble with his company and has to rely on his boarder friends to come and help him out.

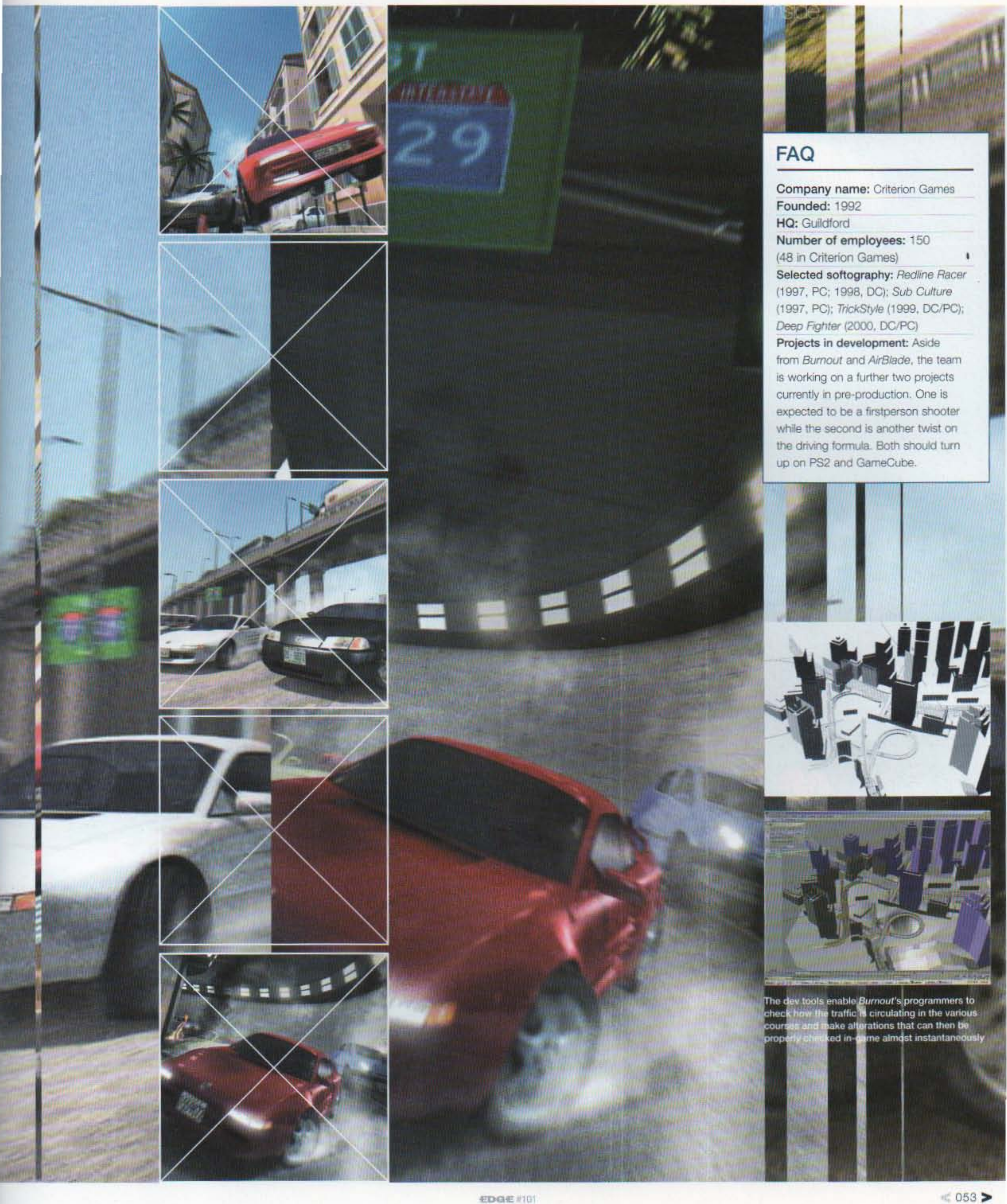
"The thing that kind of makes it a bit different from the norm is that unlike games like *Tony Hawk's*, we have the Stunt modes and all that kind of stuff, but rather than just doing stuff for points the main game mode is a Story mode, which has you doing objectives," explains **Paul Glancey**, *Airblade*'s creative manager. "So you have all that fun of doing stunts and really amazing, cool aerial stunts, but you actually get the satisfaction of moving something along so you actually do things and get the reactions from that world."

> "I haven't seen developers pushing the PS2 quite as well as we are. Most games have questionable framerates or low-res textures"

Skating storyline

Sounds interesting, but the thought of a storyline accompanying the action is surprising. It's not unlike a *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* turning up with a narrative enveloping your grinding excursions. You don't necessarily expect it, but that's not to say it won't work.

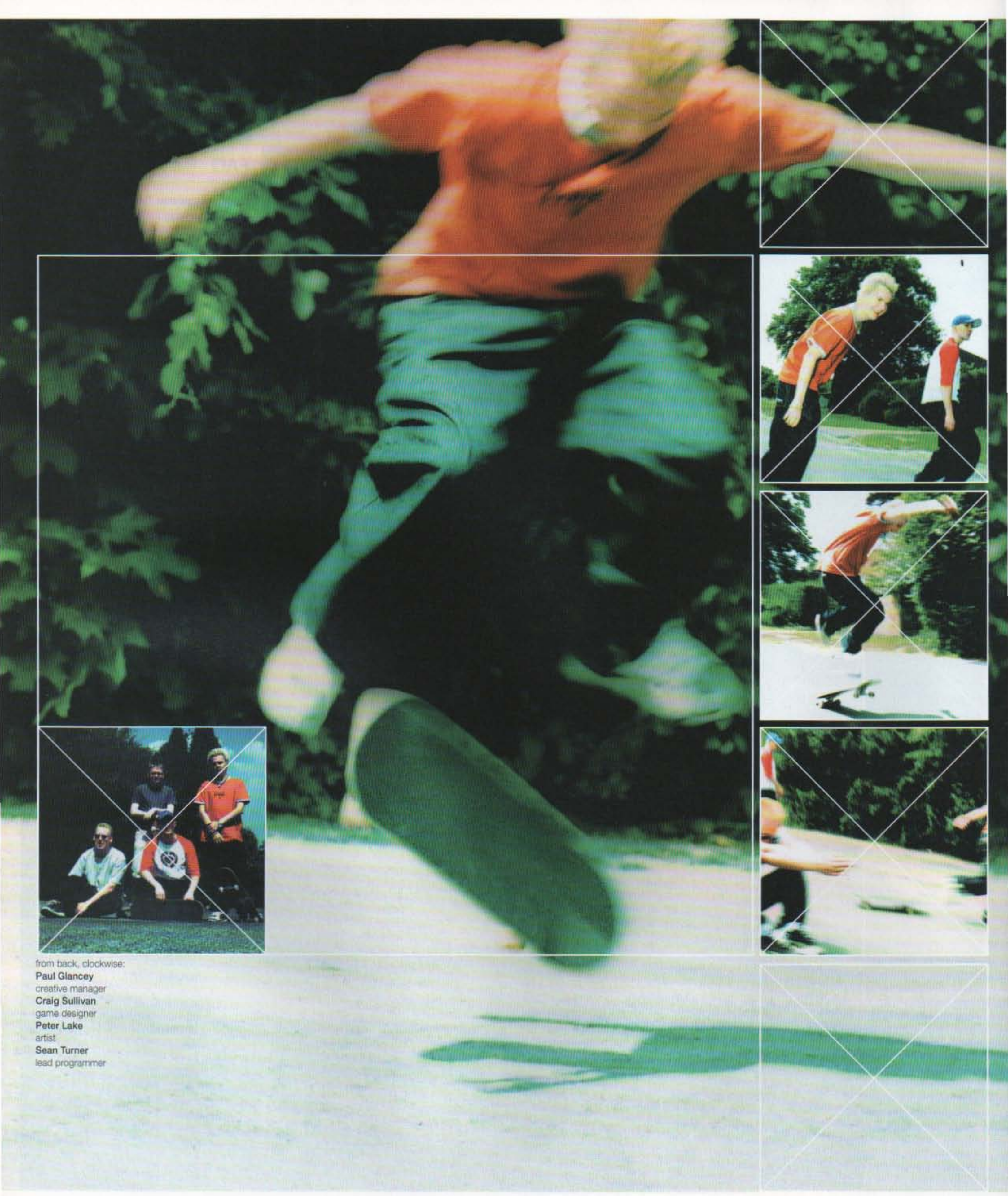
"One of the reasons why we put in a story is something that Sony were quite keen to make the most of, but also it seemed like a quite natural thing to do because if we just sort of



FAQ

Company name: Criterion Games
Founded: 1992
HQ: Guildford
Number of employees: 150 (48 in Criterion Games)
Selected softography: *Redline Racer* (1997, PC; 1998, DC); *Sub Culture* (1997, PC); *TrickStyle* (1999, DC/PC); *Deep Fighter* (2000, DC/PC)
Projects in development: Aside from *Burnout* and *AirBlade*, the team is working on a further two projects currently in pre-production. One is expected to be a firstperson shooter while the second is another twist on the driving formula. Both should turn up on PS2 and GameCube.

The dev tools enable *Burnout's* programmers to check how the traffic is circulating in the various courses and make alterations that can then be properly checked in-game almost instantaneously



from back, clockwise:
Paul Glancey
creative manager
Craig Sullivan
game designer
Peter Lake
artist
Sean Turner
lead programmer









Like *Burnout*, Criterion's second PS2 game has been created using *RenderWare* technology, courtesy of in-house teams. Swinging off posts to reach higher destinations is just one of the levels of interaction available to you in *AirBlade* (above). For instance, you can also grab hold of cars (or use them as ramps). The game encourages you to explore the levels as the number of tasks is typically low

hoisted the board on to the player and said 'Here's a flying skateboard, do what you like with it', then it doesn't really make it as special as it could be," Glancey argues convincingly. "Whereas if you attach some significance to it and make it the centre of a story, then it makes it a bit more special. And also having objectives in as opposed to just doing stuff for points, people are responding to it really well because it almost gives it a little bit regular action game feel. So it's not just a boarding game."

But not having little wheels touching the ground also helps make the experience more immediate, and could bring with it positive gameplay implications.

"We've tried as far as possible to make it an experience that was instantly 'gettable'," continues Glancey. We kind of thought that one of the faults of *Tony Hawk's* – if it has any faults at all – is that it punishes beginners quite severely, so that the first time you play it you're going to be falling off all the time. It's a pretty tricky thing to get the hang of. Because we're on a flying skateboard, essentially we don't have some of the restrictions, so that if you hit a wall, then you don't immediately fall off."

This might help novice hoverboarders look better than they are in reality, but it also promotes smoother play whenever a more proficient *AirBlader* takes over the controls. You can trick your way around the substantial levels with remarkable ease, grinding along handrails, swinging off flag posts, grabbing on to cars and generally scaring pedestrians silly. Like *Burnout*, *AirBlade*'s locales are convincing interpretations of living, breathing environments. But unlike the former, there's slightly less colour in Criterion's second near-finished PS2 project.

"We've tried to make the look of the game as realistic as possible just because you can do a game like *Jet Set Radio* but not everybody gets that graphical style," reasons Glancey. "I think a lot of players buy a machine like the PlayStation because they expect the games to look more realistic, and also realism is a style that everybody gets."

As for which of the two titles is superior, the rich graphical quality of *Burnout* should win it many supporters initially attracted to the title on visual merits alone, and the PS2's software catalogue should certainly benefit from such a vibrant-looking title. But it's not as if *AirBlade*'s world is monochrome – just a little subdued in comparison to the developer's arcade racer. Crucially, at this stage, control – which is cunningly similar to the *Tony Hawk* games – feels tight and instinctive at all times, and the fluidity of gameplay is only really appreciated once the joypad is in your hands.

And this is perhaps the biggest change **Edge** has witnessed in Criterion. Compared to a mildly depressing company visit some years back (simply because the titles on show at the time were regrettably generic), the softco has bounced back with dedicated teams displaying a far finer understanding of the fundamental constituents of gameplay. It's an inspiring sight.

Of course, Criterion Games is hard at work on other concepts. But that's for another visit. Right now, the projects **Edge** has just seen offer enough potential to tide things over for some time yet.





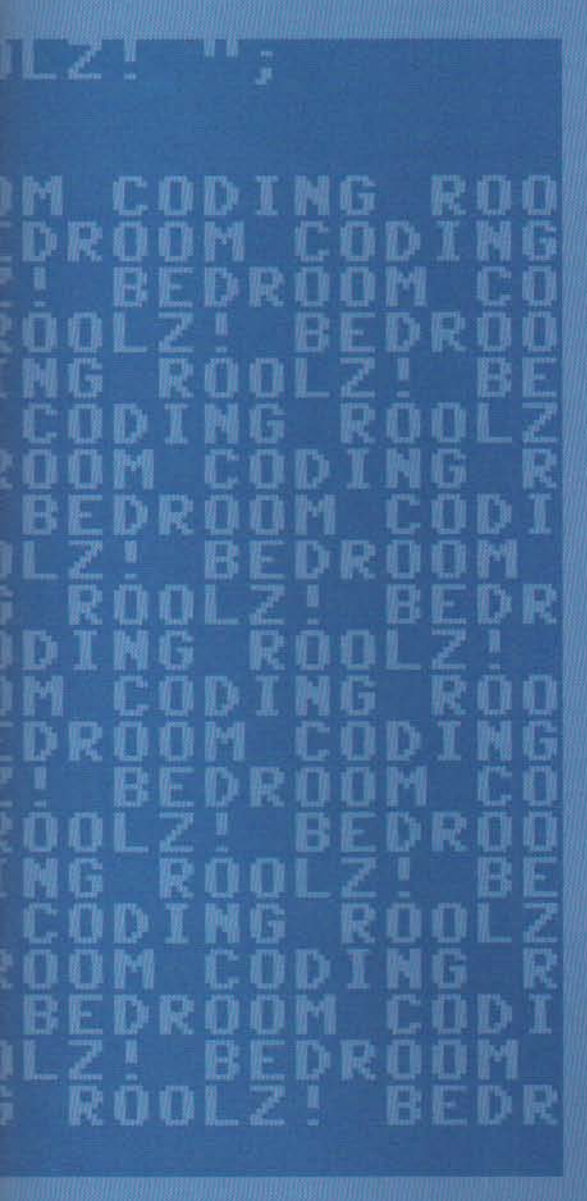
Catch the ribbon: one of the twoplayer modes where a tape increases in length the longer you hold it, or until your opponents swipes it from you. Like the main game, this is great entertainment


SONY
RESET
10 PRINT "BEDROOM CODING R
20 GOTO 10
RUN
BEDROOM CODING ROOLZ! BEDR
LZ! BEDROOM CODING ROOLZ!
ROOLZ! BEDROOM CODING ROO
DING ROOLZ! BEDROOM CODING
M CODING ROOLZ! BEDROOM CO
DROOM CODING ROOLZ! BEDROO
! BEDROOM CODING ROOLZ! BE
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< Back to BASICs

In these big-budget times the roots of the British videogame industry – bedroom coders – can be overlooked. **Edge** talks to the people determined to make sure that doesn't happen



To be honest, if I am proud of anything, it's that we are the largest game programming language publisher in the UK. It's pathetic, but I am severely fucking proud of the fact because I'm addicted to programming," says **Jon Silvera**, MD of FastTrak, publisher of the *DarkBASIC* and *DIV Game Studio* home-coding packages.

Cutting his teeth on 6502 and Z80 assembler language back in the '80s, Silvera was part of what used to be called the bedroom-programming scene. Starting with ZX81 home computers and moving onto Spectrums, C64s, Amigas, and Ataris, teenagers such as the Darlings, the Oliver twins, and Jez San progressed from after-school programming clubs to careers in what became the fledgling UK game development industry. But like the vast majority of coders, Silvera didn't become a developer. His enthusiasm petered out, killed off by the rise of the less-accessible Wintel boxes and the responsibilities of twentysomething life and work.

It didn't take long to recover that loving feeling, though. "The minute I started programming with *DIV*, I went back 15 years in a second," Silvera recalls. "Within ten minutes I had a sprite moving around. Within 15 minutes I had 50 sprites colliding with each other with sounds. I was gobsmacked. Within an hour, I had 400 sprites and a ship I was controlling, and I was just, 'Oh my God, here we go again'."

And in a Victor Kiam-esque moment, Silvera decided that *DIV Games Studio* was a product FastTrak had to release: "I brought it to the office and said, 'Look, this isn't going to be a big seller but it has to go on the shelf. Too many people are going to get something out of it'," he says. A low-commitment deal with its Spanish creators resulted, and the package, despite being a technically limited 2D-only affair, has gone on to

"THE MINUTE I STARTED CODING WITH *DIV*, I WENT BACK 15 YEARS IN A SECOND. WITHIN AN HOUR I HAD 400 SPITES AND A SHIP, AND I WAS JUST 'OH MY GOD, HERE WE GO AGAIN'"

sell 11,000-odd units in the UK

Buying back the years

Previously best known for publishing the *eJay* range of PC music creation software, FastTrak, with Silvera now installed as general manager, realised it had stumbled into a new niche market. "With the *eJay* products we went into a market that barely existed in the UK," says Silvera. "We got involved, and two years later there are 30 competitors and we have 75 per cent of the market." And while the market for home programming languages is never going to be that big, there seems to be a general feeling that it is a scene whose time has come again.

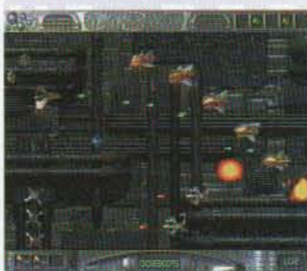
"Are there few programming products because no one wants to do that any more, or because people don't know they exist?" muses Silvera.

"WHILE I WOULDN'T SAY IT HAS BEEN A HUGE SUCCESS FOR FASTTRAK, IN SOME WAY *DIV* HAS BEEN A MASSIVE SUCCESS. I EXPECTED TO SELL 3,000 UNITS, AND I'VE SOLD 11,000"

"I can pretty much guarantee that it's because no one has done it, and while I wouldn't say it has been a huge success for FastTrak, in some ways DIV has been a massive success. I expected to sell 3,000 units, and I've sold 11,000."

The release of the more advanced *DarkBASIC 3D* package has cemented that success. Developed by Lee Bamber, of *AMOS* fame, the package had been available only as a download via the Macclesfield-based company's Web site. The boxed retail version, published by FastTrak, has sold more than 5,000 units in the UK since April, and, fuelled by a half-price offer, it's the number-one-selling PC software on Amazon.co.uk as well.





Despite being technically limited, good-looking games can come out of *DIV*





DIV Game Studio is also capable of enabling home coders to produce relatively complex titles, like this football game



Created using *DarkBASIC*, *Freeform* is an *Elite* clone that is being sold as a $20 download from Crystal Interactive. Another *DarkBASIC* title on sale soon is *StarWraith*

A simple language for simple folk

1.0

The Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code (BASIC) programming language was invented in 1963 to make life easier for engineers programming in FORTRAN and COBOL. Although its structure makes it far simpler to use than other languages, its main failing is a lack of implementation speed. Compiled languages such as C++ and Java are compiled and compressed into a binary executable. An interpreted language, BASIC is only checked for errors at runtime. Newer versions of BASIC, including *DarkBASIC* and *Blitz Basic*, aren't interpreted, however, relying on a compiled script to give much faster implementation speeds.

DIV Games Studio

2.1

Current version: v1.0
Platform: PC (MS-DOS)
Price: £35
Web site: www.div-arena.com
Download size for evaluation copy: 10Mb
Released: 1996
Creator: Daniel Navarro Medrano
Origin: Spain
Publisher: FastTrak
Description: self-contained 2D game creation package
Installed base: 11,000-plus
Next version: *DIV 2*
Strengths: Well-integrated package, simple commands
Weaknesses: Only 256 colours, low sound quality, doesn't support *Windows*
About: Created as part of a thesis project, *DIV Game Studio* is technically the least-advanced package in the round-up, but what it lacks in polish, it makes up for in potential. More than a programming language, *DIV* is better described as an environment for 2D game creation. It contains a comprehensive graphic editor which enables users to create all the graphic assets need for a game. *DIV*'s programming language, while structurally like C, uses simple BASIC-type statements. And though the package can not deal with proper 3D, it does support the pseudo 3D of Nintendo's Mode 7.

DIV's capabilities will be greatly improved with the release of *DIV 2* later in the year. It is hoped this will introduce 16bit colour and DirectMusic support as well as tidying up various issues of stability surrounding its DOS implementation and adding Mode 8. A major upgrade to *DIV 3* has also been mooted. But *DIV*'s greatest strength is its community. Not as large as *DarkBASIC*'s, it is nevertheless enthusiastic, and, thanks to its smaller size, more responsive and friendly.



Despite only being a 2D package, DIV Game Studio has an undeniable charm – as demonstrated by Jeremy Wood's quirky platformer *Vertically Challenged*





"Around 10,000 people have downloaded the free demo version," says Bamber. "With 3Gb worth of free trial downloads going through our server a day, I dare say we've just scratched the surface." As if to prove the point, DarkBASIC Software is releasing *The 3D GameMaker*, a massmarket menu-driven game creation package which uses a *DarkBASIC* core, through Actualise in September.

"We looked at the strong community created from the Amiga version of *Blitz Basic* and felt no one was addressing the 'back-bedroom programming' fraternity properly," concurs **George Bray** of FastTrak rival Guildhall Leisure, which published a 2D version of *Blitz Basic* for the PC last year. It will be launching the product in Germany, Holland, Spain, Sweden, and the US, as well as releasing a much-anticipated 3D upgrade for *Blitz* in September.

This demand for entry level programming packages shouldn't be a surprise. With 30-odd computer game university courses available in the UK and the 'A'-level age range of the PlayStation generation, there been a huge growth in the number of teenagers who fancy a career in computergames. It's not uncommon for their parents to phone admissions tutors asking for career advice for their 12-year-old sons who 'want to make computer games'.

But it may be difficult to harness this enthusiasm. In the '80s computers were accessible to even the youngest. Switch on any pre-*Windows* computer and you are greeted by the prompt 'Ready'. Programming was required to get the machine to perform the easiest of tasks, and considering the hassle it took to load a game from cassette, it wasn't surprising that a culture of curiosity grew up, even if all that resulted was a scrolling

"WE LOOKED AT THE STRONG COMMUNITY CREATED FROM THE AMIGA VERSION OF *BLITZ BASIC* AND FELT NO ONE WAS ADDRESSING THE 'BACK-BEDROOM PROGRAMMING' FRATERNITY PROPERLY"



One of the most professional *DarkBASIC* examples is *Equilibrium*, a single-level demo of a turn-based RPG

DarkBASIC

2.2

Current version: v1.0.9
Platform: PC (*Win95*, *98*, *ME*, and *2000*)
Price: £40
Web site: www.darkbasic.com
Download size for evaluation copy: 22Mb
Released: 2000
Creator: Lee Bamber
Origin: UK
Publisher: FastTrak
Description: 2D/3D game programming language
Installed base: 5,000-plus
Next version: v1.1
Strengths: Easy to get into, uses DirectX as core technology, good tutorials
Weaknesses: No multiplayer or Internet capability
About: The simplest 3D programming language, *DarkBASIC* is a BASIC interpretation of Microsoft's DirectX game API. More than 650 commands give users access to the features of DirectX 7, including hardware transform and lighting functionality. The 3D engine is in the process of being rewritten to take into account the per vertex and pixel shaders of DX8. Other DirectX features such as sound, music, and control of peripherals such as force feedback joysticks are also available. For beginners, *DarkBASIC* comes with an excellent tutorial which takes users through the creation of a firstperson game, covering everything from camera control to collision detection and AI routines. The graphic user interface is simple, if somewhat crude, although there is an externally developed editor available, called *DarkEdit*, which overcomes these problems.

As it is a programming language, *DarkBASIC* does not have an inbuilt level or model editor. Models using the *3DS Max* or DirectX's X file format can be loaded. Basic terrain can be created using a mesh tied to the matrix command, and it does support built-in 3D primitive shapes such as spheres and cones. And while some concerns have been voiced, notably over its 2D performance, these are unlikely to concern amateur coders. The most important attributes of *DarkBASIC* are non-technical, however. It has a large online community, which provides technical help, sample code, editors, and viewer and general discussion forums.

Blitz Basic

2.3

Current version: v1.49
Platform: PC (Win95, 98, ME and 2000)
Price: £30
Web site: www.blitzbasic.com & www.blitz-3d.com
Download size for evaluation copy: 6.9Mb
Released: 2000
Creator: Mark Sibly
Origin: New Zealand/UK
Publisher: Guildhall Leisure
Description: 2D game-creation package
Installed base: 2,000-plus
Next version: *Blitz Basic 3D*
Strengths: Fast code, uses DirectX core
Weaknesses: Less support than *DarkBASIC*
About: Like *DarkBASIC*, *Blitz Basic* is a fast programming language for game creation. It offers users more than 300 commands to unlock DirectX functionality. Written by Mark Sibly, who created *Blitz* for the Amiga, the PC version compiles down to a machine code executable for fast implementation. It has a clear user interface with good context-sensitive help support. The source code is a standard text file, although *Blitz* must be used to compile and debug. Like *DarkBASIC*, games can be outputted as a standalone executable.

At the moment *Blitz Basic* is less supported than its competitor, but the biggest issue is the release of its 3D component. A beta version is available, which is causing much discussion in forums. The 3D demos that have been released look great, but some people think it is harder to program for than *DarkBASIC*.



Looking like a *Mario 64* clone, this castle demo shows off dynamic terrain, sliding collision, and the intelligent camera available in the *Blitz Basic 3D* package

Although it runs on PlayStation2, YABASIC is a limited programming language, especially when it comes to attempting to implement 3D – as the effort above underlines

The 3D Game Maker

2.4

Current version: beta
Platform: PC
Price: TBC
Web site: www.the3dgamemaker.com
Size download for evaluation copy: n/a
Released: September 2001
Creator: *DarkBASIC* team
Origin: UK
Publisher: Actualise
Description: 3D game-creation package
Install base: n/a
Next version: n/a
Strengths: Ease of use
Weaknesses: Limited functionality
About: Building on *DarkBASIC*'s technology, the team behind it is branching out into the massmarket with *The 3D Game Maker*. Using an extremely simple interface, it lets users create basic genres such as shooting, driving and flying games by clicking on predefined selections and entering numbers. Users can input their own textures, but the 3D models of weapons, enemies, and vehicles are fixed. Other areas open to user input include attributes such as AI routines, enemy spawning, weapon abilities and simple gameplay conditions. Compared to other home-coding packages *The 3D Game Maker* is extremely limited, confining its likely audience to the preteen market

YABASIC

2.5

Current version: v1
Platform: PlayStation2
Price: Free (PAL territories)
Web site: www.playstation-basic.com
Download size for evaluation copy: n/a
Released: 2000
Creators: Mike Dean, James Russell, and Mike Kavallierou
Origin: UK
Publisher: Sony
Description: Programming language for PlayStation2
Install base: 1 million-plus
Next version: TBC
Strengths: Only console-based BASIC available in Europe
Weaknesses: Little support, need keyboard, limited functionality
About: Derived from the Yet Another BASIC open-source PC language, *YABASIC* for PlayStation2 was an attempt to enthuse the next generation of home-console coders. It wasn't designed to enable users to create complete games, and offers a limited range of functions compared to the other packages. And while Sony has done little to promote YABASIC, there is a loyal community – sample code for simple games such as *Pong* is available, for example. Plans remain to update the language at some point, but with project leader Mike Dean currently working in Sony Japan, nothing is expected until 2002 at the earliest.

'HELLO WORLD' statement. Today, kids are more likely to sit in front of a dedicated game console rather than their Dad's £1,000 PC.

One solution is Sony's YABASIC language, which comes on the free demo disc bundled with every PAL PlayStation2. "Most of the people who are into games programming grew up on Commodores, BBCs, Spectrums, and their way into programming was through BASIC languages," says **Mike Dean**, the instigator of the YABASIC project. "Now when you get a PC you get *Windows*. I pity the eight-year-old child who has to go through GNU toolchain or Visual Studio. As an enthusiastic eight-year-old programmer myself, I wanted to allow the next generation to discover programming for themselves."

With users requiring a USB keyboard to get the most out of YABASIC and little support forthcoming from Sony, the project is unlikely to take off until the PS2's hard drive and modem are released. "We have many ideas we'd like to implement to update the code, but I don't want to make promises as to when they'll be released," Dean says.

"I PITY THE EIGHT-YEAR-OLD CHILD WITH A PC WHO HAS TO GO THROUGH A GNU TOOLCHAIN OR VISUAL STUDIO. I WANTED TO ALLOW THE NEXT GENERATION TO DISCOVER PROGRAMMING FOR THEMSELVES"

The great divide

It appears that the majority of new-generation home coders are the grown-up remnants of the original generation. A cursory examination of *DarkBASIC* users' registration cards reveals ages ranging from early twenties to late forties, but if some do have aspirations to get into the industry, no developer is likely to employ programmers without experience of high-level languages such as C++. BASIC, even BASIC with a DirectX core, doesn't cut it these days.

"After winning the Best Graphics in a *DIV* competition, I emailed a number of Game Boy Advance developers. Sadly I didn't get so much as a response from any of them, which was very disappointing," says **Jeremy Wood**, one of the most active *DIV Game Studio* programmers (see www.lightmare.co.uk). Despite being registered blind, the 27-year-old is keen to get a job as a game developer. "I know I could become a valued part of any game creation team if I was given the opportunity to demonstrate my abilities. I just have to keep trying," he says.

"I was looking for a PC programming language that could



The 3D Game Maker enables the user to create games by clicking on icons and entering values – easy coding for preteens



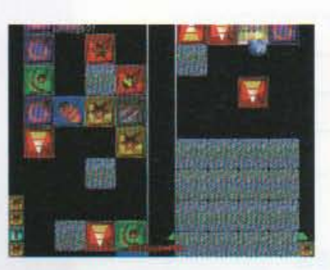


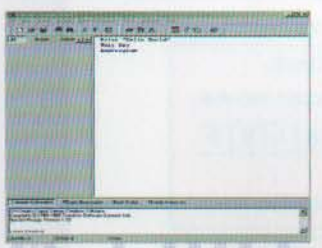


DXCreator

2.6

Current version: v1.7
Platform: PC
Price: n/a
Web site: www.dx-creator.com
Download size for evaluation copy: 5.3Mb
Released: 1999
Creator: S Riggall & N Harris
Origin: UK
Publisher: Terminus Software Systems
Description: 2D game creation package
Install base: n/a
Next version: n/a
Strengths: Good interface with inbuilt editors
Weaknesses: 2D package, no longer supported
About: One of the first examples of a BASIC game creation tool built on DirectX, *DXCreator* fell by the wayside. Although it can still be downloaded, there is no ongoing development, making it something of a cul de sac for prospective home coders. Nevertheless, it is a nice 2D-only program, with a well-designed interface, including a map editor, bitmap animation editor, loop editor, and a sound editor.





The *DXCreator* language is no longer supported, but that didn't stop *Tileblazer* (top) being published on the Net

replace my old favourite *AMOS* on the Amiga, as well as giving me the ability to create 3D," agrees **Richard Heail**, another home programmer. "There wasn't much that offered an easy learning curve until *DarkBASIC*. It uses DirectX and allows you to write functions and use include files, which are a major part of C++ programming," he explains, adding, "Given the chance I would like to code games professionally, and this is one of the driving forces behind learning C++."

According to *Blitz Basic*'s creator **Mark Sibly**, his product does have a place in professional game development, however. "Now that *Blitz3D* is imminent, it is completely feasible it could be used by professional developers," he says. Dark Basic Software's **Lee Bamber** agrees: "I discovered, purely by chance, that *DarkBASIC* is already being used by some triple-A developers as a prototyping tool due to the relative ease at which you can visualise an idea in code."

"THERE WASN'T MUCH THAT OFFERED AN EASY LEARNING CURVE UNTIL *DARKBASIC*. IT USES DIRECTX AND ALLOWS YOU TO WRITE FUNCTIONS AND USE INCLUDE FILES, WHICH ARE A MAJOR PART OF C++"



Indeed, developers are selling games on the Internet developed using *DarkBASIC*. "A couple of guys wrote an *Elite* clone called *Freeform*. Crystal Interactive is selling it for $20 on its Web site," says Silvera. Guildhall, too, will be unveiling a range of games created with *Blitz Basic*. "I'm proud to announce that we recently signed a deal with Jeff Minter to convert his titles to PC using Blitz," says Bray. "The first five games are *Gridrunner*, *Ancipital*, *Hover Bovver*, *Iridis Alpha*, and *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels II*. We are launching around 30 titles in September, all created with *Blitz*, and we aim to have 100 titles in our 'games created with *Blitz* range' by early next year."

But for most users of *DarkBASIC* or *Blitz Basic*, it's the journey not the destination which is important. "I think if you enjoy what you're creating and get pleasure playing it yourself, you are halfway to creating a good game," says Wood. "To see someone enjoying my game means a great deal to me and inspires me to write more."

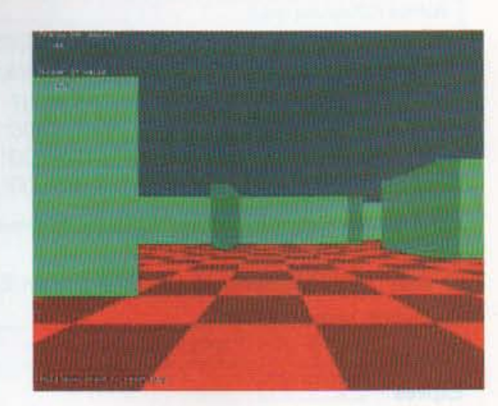
"Programming is about bugs, getting stuck. It's a culture, a way of thinking," ends Silvera, ever the enthusiast. "One time my girlfriend had gone away and I spent three or four days working on a 3D version of *Berzerk*. It was the best three or four days I have had in 20 years. That's why I love programming; it's the buzz."

Jamagic

2.7

Current version: build 11
Platform: PC
Price: TBC
Web site: www.clickteam.com
Download size for evaluation copy: 32Mb
Released: 2001
Creators: François Lionet and Yves Lamoureu
Origin: France
Publisher: ClickTeam
Description: Cross-platform 2D/3D game-creation package
Install base: n/a
Next version: Commercial release September
Strengths: Good 3D engine, novel approach to language
Weaknesses: Has been in development for a long time
About: Like Mark Sibly and Lee Bamber, the men behind ClickTeam, have a history of developing home-coding packages. These include *STOS*, *AMOS* and *Klik & Play*, but now François Lionet and Yves Lamoureu have gone one step forward. More than just a programming language, Jamagic is an integrated 3D/2D-development system. Using what is called the Jamagic scripting language – broadly equivalent to JavaScript for Web pages – users will gain access to a fast 3D engine combined with a 2D sprite engine.

The Jamagicscript syntax gives the flexibility of an object-orientated language such as C++, but without its complexity. Like BASIC, however, Jamagicscript is not compiled, which raises questions over code implementation speed. *Jamagic* contains an integrated 3D-world editor for set objects and lights, and a picture editor for bitmap manipulation. The 3D engine supports DirectX 6 and optimised software rendering. Apparently it can handle an unlimited number of objects, polygons, textures, lights, and cameras.



The product of four days of Jon Silvera's life was this Mode 7-powered version of *Berzerk*, created using *DIV Game Studio*



Starting over

Flying the corporate nest and setting up a company is the dream of many a worker in the videogame industry, but what are the realities of going it alone? **Edge** gets the inside story from the people who've started over



The little computer people are restless. Hunched over rows of terminals they are beginning to openly show signs of discontent. Three are slumped over their PCs; two are playing *Quake* – which is forbidden. Another (dressed in a thrash metal T-shirt to signify his status as project leader) is running around the isometric office barking orders. An icon in the top left corner of the screen warns that the milestone payment will not be received if productivity continues



Lost Toys Games

Established: 1998
Number of games released: one
Number of staff: 14
Current project: unnamed 3D shooter

The story is typical. Tired of churning out code for franchised games at EA's Bullfrog, Jeremy Longley, Glenn Corpse, and Darran Thomas set out to make inventive titles. Their first independent game, *MoHo*, was one of last year's most novel games, but suffered from gameplay frustrations. Signed up to Take Two and financed by Les Edgar, the team hopes that its next project, which can only be broadly categorised as a 3D shooter, will be traditional enough to woo the massmarket but also display massive amounts of originality.

Longley on pitching to publishers:

"It's no good just having a cool particle system. A demo doesn't need to be playable but it needs to show what it would be like if you were playing it"

to plummet. One digital coder gets up from his desk, and then promptly collapses. The pizza supply is running out. Morale is desperate. And the *Megagame*? Perhaps the Infinite Polygon Engine +1 was just a tad too ambitious – welcome to the *startup Sims*.

This would be a comic stereotype of the game Bullfrog might have produced had it not, ironically, spawned so many startup companies itself. The rules are simple: take the £100,000 nest egg earned from your previous job and build a new development team capable of taking a game from concept to master. But *startup Sims* would offer little practical advice to those considering the jump from corporate coder to startup powermonger. **Edge** talked to the creatives who decided to go it alone when times were more favourable: many have flourished; others have struggled. Some haven't even released a game yet. What follows are the testimonies (and begrudging advice) of those who risked their life savings and are still staying alive in the startup game.

The leap of faith

Bug fixing and coding data for menu screens may not be the most stimulating part of a programmer's lot, but taking the decision to up sticks and found a new development company is a veritable health hazard. Even before the business plan is drafted and the game concept is sketched there are obstacles to negotiate. Not least is finding the right moment to leave the cosy world of corporate coding. **David Doak**, co-founder of Free Radical Design, highlights the dilemma: "The timing of leaving is difficult because of the cyclical nature of development. No one in their righ mind would leave the day something is mastered because of the royalties involved. In practice you won't see any royalty strean for another six months, and by that time you've already invested six months in a nev project. I was elated at leaving Rare and going on to do something else, but the downside is actually meeting people that have a job and you don't. I had a certain amount of money that I saved from *GoldenEye*, but it was ticking down. That's when you're sitting around in your dressing gown trying to find the numbers of publishers. Trying to cold call people. It can be quite unnerving."

Toby Gard is similarly pragmatic about the financial rewards which must be waivec if the leap into startup development is taken. Leaving Core Design to set up Confounding Factor meant losing all his subsequent *Tomb Raider* royalties. Indeed, his last royalty payment was even pulled from his bank account after he decided to go it alone. "There was a lot of money to b left behind," he says. "But I had to make that decision. I didn't want someone else making all the money off my work. A lot of it was sitting around and not even having equipment. That lasted for six months. It took all that time just to get a proper publishing deal. Negotiations are the hardest thing, because publishers can wait for as long as they like. It's not like the are losing any income. We were a special case because of *Tomb Raider*. They just wanted to phone us up straight away. But it was still difficult."

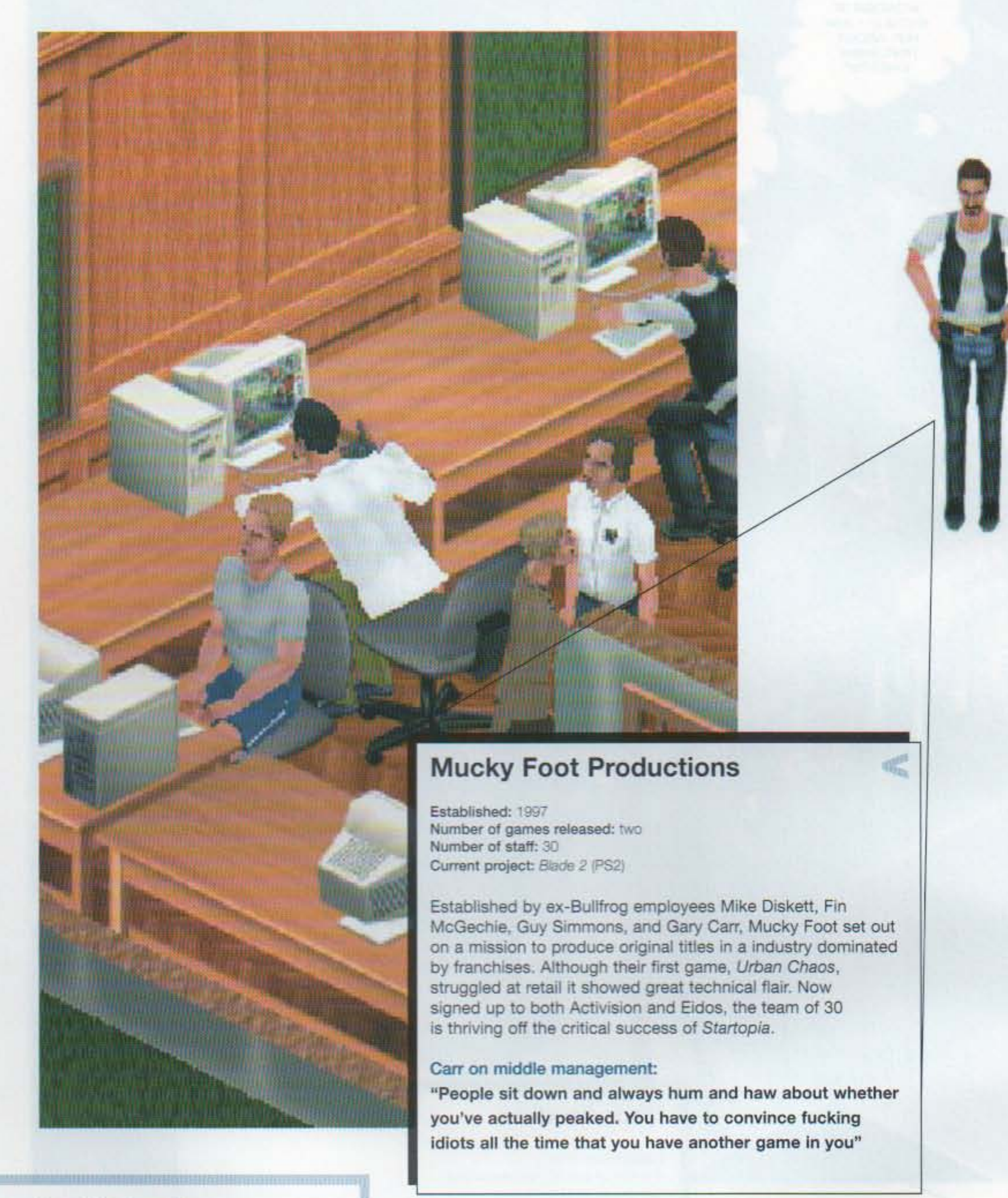
"There was a lot of money to be left behind, but I had to make that decision. I didn't want someone else making all the money off my work"

But for many the prospect of self governance far outweighed the financial hardships and long hours which came with a new business venture. "I worked on a game for a year and a half which got canned because some American guy didn't like it," discloses **Jeremy Longley**, who left Bullfrog to co-found Lost Toys. "I was fed up. Now I don't live in fear of someone coming across The Pond, taking a look at my game, and saying, 'No, I don't like it, that's the end – you're sacked'. For all the big-company security, I've seen that happen a few times."

The business plan

But how much does a modern videogame cost to make? It's a simple enough question, but one which varies wildly depending upon the project. Offices and equipment must be paid for up front, with payroll taking the brunt of the rest. Back in the mid-'90s it was typical for a small developer to ask for an advance of £100,000 to see a project through to completion. Now, the figures have inflated massively. When **Gary Carr** joined Mucky Foot as a director in 1998, the team was in the process of putting a business plan together. "I remember at the time Mike [Diskett] saying, 'Well, does £250,000 sound all right?' And, of course, that was way off," he recalls. "Quite often it makes sense to think of a number and just double it. It's probably more accurate than the initial idea you had in your head. We were very honest with our staff. The major outlay is payroll. If a game takes two years and you have 20 people working on it, and they are earning a relatively good salary, it's basic maths. We wouldn't be able to do a computer game now for under two million quid. And that goes up all the time."

Searching for a suitable office



Mucky Foot Productions

Established: 1997
Number of games released: two
Number of staff: 30
Current project: *Blade 2* (PS2)

Established by ex-Bullfrog employees Mike Diskett, Fin McGechie, Guy Simmons, and Gary Carr, Mucky Foot set out on a mission to produce original titles in a industry dominated by franchises. Although their first game, *Urban Chaos*, struggled at retail it showed great technical flair. Now signed up to both Activision and Eidos, the team of 30 is thriving off the critical success of *Startopia*.

Carr on middle management:
"People sit down and always hum and haw about whether you've actually peaked. You have to convince fucking idiots all the time that you have another game in you"

"The major outlay is payroll – it's basic maths. We wouldn't be able to do a computer game now for under two million quid. And that goes up all the time"



Elixir Studios

Established: 1998
Number of games released: none
Number of staff: 37
Current project: *Republic: The Revolution* (PC)

Still in his early 20s, Demis Hassabis has already left two companies to start his own ventures. After working on *Theme Park* for Bullfrog (at the age of 15) he later left to become a founding member of Lionhead Studios with Peter Molyneux. However, the dream did not last and he soon moved on to start-up Elixir. Hassabis's friendship (not to mention his vision and talents) with Ian Livingstone got him a deal with Eidos Interactive. Though *Republic* has taken much longer than anticipated, it was one of the most impressive titles at E3.

Hassabis on penury:

"You have to risk leaving a steady salary to live on the breadline for up to a year. You have to be prepared to compromise your lifestyle to that extent"

environment and then waiting for equipment to arrive can take months. For Free Radical Design early planning meetings often took place in less than desirable locations. "We went through a stage where everyone was meeting down the pub," recalls Doak. "Get your company incorporated and get your identity sorted out. Make sure you get a place of business, even if it isn't anything fancy at the start. It just needs to be an office so that people know it's a job and not a hobby. We paid around £700 a month for our first place. One really annoying thing is that until you have significant backing everyone thinks you are a pretend company. It was difficult to even buy some chairs or get a phone installed."

Some companies, such as Elixir Studios, attempted to get funding through venture capitalists. It was a route which proved frustrating for Elixir's founder, Demis Hassabis. A boozy business lunch and a lot of talk only served to get him an offer of a £200K job in the City. Some time later a deal came through, but the VC wanted 50 per cent of his company. Eventually, Hassabis had to go the tried-and-tested route with a publisher. **Peter Molyneux** and Les Edgar – both former Bullfrog directors – provide financial assistance to startups with vision and talent. While Molyneux supports companies such as Big Blue Box with his satellite scheme, Edgar acts as a business angel for Lost Toys. The financial backing helps with the early financial burden, but it comes at a premium in profits.

Keeping costs to a minimum is also crucial. The temptation to take the first cheque and buy extravagant equipment may be strong, but in the long term could spell disaster. "If you start with half a dozen people and buy expensive equipment, it can easily cost a few hundred thousand," warns Doak. "Especially when everyone insists they have a chair like John Romero's." But while a well-turned-out office may look more professional, it won't necessarily inspire better games, notes Doak: "We were talking to Sony about getting a dev kit and we were in an easy-in easy-out office in Nottingham. To their credit, they came to talk to us. Those were critical days, and I remember thinking 'This is our big shot'. If they thought we were buffoons we might have to wait another six months. They came to an office with guys who used to hang an air conditioner out of the window. Down the hall there were 20 failed Internet companies. But we got a prototype dev kit which came in September."

Foot in the door

So, you've found a ramshackle office. The photocopier and fax machine have been plugged in. Now the real work begins. But be warned: publishers will not entertain an audience with coders unless they can display hard evidence of game craft. "There were three things we needed," says Longley. "A game idea that we could summarise in a sentence, a good business plan, and a demo. I can't overstate how important it is to have a demo. They can be expensive to produce, but it does set things off on the right foot. If You're going to ask for X thousand pounds from a publisher with two bits of A4, you'll struggle."

It's a harsh fact that reputation counts for nothing with many publishers. For Doak it was a bizarre and frustrating situation: even with two thirds of the *GoldenEye* team joining Free Radical Design, the door remained firmly closed. "It's incredible. If you play through *GoldenEye* and look at the credits, three of them were with Free Radical," Doak says. "But big game publishers have amazing self-defence mechanisms. Any ten-year-old can ring them up about a game idea. *GoldenEye* was a fickle currency. Sometimes people would want to talk, but sometimes it turned into a Spanish Inquisition. There's a lot of stupid questions, and often you'd be talking to very junior people. There were a couple of people who wasted a lot of our time."

Both Mucky Foot and Lost Toys employed an agent to help them get a foot in the door. "Even doing all those years at Bullfrog didn't convince people of our worth," concurs Carr. "Quite often the people you have to talk to don't have a

"There were three things we needed: a game idea that we could summarise in a sentence; a good business plan; and a demo. I can't overstate how important it is to have a demo"

Free Radical Design

Established: 1998
Number of games released: one
Number of staff: 20
Current project: *TimeSplitters 2* (PS2)

When a third of the *GoldenEye* team left Rare to form a new company it hardly caused a ripple. But David Doak, Steve Ellis, and Karl Hilton had major plans to produce one of the slickest console FPS games within 18 months. Lee Ray and Graeme Norgate also joined from Rare, and the team managed to get the excellent *TimeSplitters* out for the launch of PS2. Its publisher, Eidos, is looking forward to seeing even better success when *TimeSplitters 2* is released in spring 2002.

Doak on negotiation:

"Publishers will ask, 'Is it going to have curved surfaces?' and then we'd say that's not going to happen just yet. But they say, 'Of course its going to happen, I've just seen it at the Tokyo Game Show"

Crawfish Interactive

Established: 1997
Number of games released: 26
Number of staff: 36
Current project: *Streetfighter Alpha 3* (GBA)

After working with Probe on a freelance basis, Cameron Sheppard realised he could make more of an impact in Game Boy coding by forming his own company. Crawfish's specialisation in handheld games gives it more flexibility due to short development cycles (six to nine months). With an impressive range of titles, including *Driver* and *Rainbow Six*, it is now looking to expand by setting up an Australian office and developing interactive TV games.

Sheppard on enthusiasm:

"If you're passionate about what you do and work your bollocks off, then show you'll do your utmost to look after your staff, that counts for a lot"





Lionhead Studios

Established: 1997
Number of games released: one
Number of staff: 90
Current project: *Dimitri* (TBC)

After selling Bullfrog to EA for 'a ridiculous amount of money', Peter Molyneux decided to start from first principles again. Alongside Steve Jackson, Mark Webley, and Tim Rance, Molyneux began to build a new empire consisting of separate companies. The Lionhead satellite strategy currently consists of Big Blue Box, Intrepid, and Black & White Studios. Each has access to Lionhead's support and technical facilities, which potentially means profits are generated at staggered periods. After the success of *Black & White*, Lionhead is currently working on the mysterious *Dimitri*.

Molyneux on time management:

"You can spend a ridiculous amount of time doing stupid things like deciding whether the company should go and see the new 'Tomb Raider' movie"





fucking clue. That's the way it is. They are in a position to say yes or no, and they've never written a game. Initially we used John Cooke. Agents are a valid way of opening doors and might get you appointments where you might not. But to some extent they have a shelf life, because once you've done a game people know you and it's ridiculous paying them ten per cent."

Publishers offer very different financial packages depending on experience, game concept, and raw negotiation skills. **Dave Rose**, director of development at Eidos, is keen to point out that there is no 'standard' deal. "Finance and royalties will vary by format, risk, licence and costs," he explains. "Eidos will work with new developers to help them get off the ground. There is no benefit to us in offering poor deals to startups. If we have belief and a title is successful, I would hope that both developer and publisher will want to continue that relationship long term. There is little chance of this if there is resentment over a poor deal."

Negotiating the deal

Although publishers are reluctant to name figures, royalty rates can range from 15 to 30 per cent, with the sum fluctuating dependent upon a number of contractual obligations. All the startups **Edge** talked to warned against the evils of three-game deals – something which is becoming more common in the industry. So many years tied to one publisher in a fickle industry is just not worth the risk. Paying for good solicitors and going through every clause of a contract is just as onerous, but ultimately pays dividends.

"If you've got a one-game deal you can get rid of the evil clauses next time," advises Gard. "Most say they won't give a one-game deal but in reality it is negotiable. You go from a cosy development position into extreme deal mongering. I was not prepared for that. What I found was that there are some solicitors who will go and put your deal on the table to different publishers and play them off against each other. You're not getting personal so you can be hard-assed about it. The really big solicitors can do this."

"Bear in mind that the first draft of a contract is just that. If your contract is negotiated in weeks, you are doing something wrong. Every point in a contract must be viciously fought out"

"Bear in mind that the first draft of a contract is just that," adds Molyneux. "If your contract is negotiated in weeks, you are doing something wrong. Every point in a contract must be viciously fought out. You might have to pay a good solicitor a lot of money, but an innocent clause like 'using best endeavours' could come back to haunt you. Every single person will have to work every single hour no matter what your company is doing – even if you have a contract with someone else. Suddenly you can realise that simple clauses turn into handcuffs."

For some, royalties are less important

Confounding Factor

Established: 1997
Number of games released: none
Number of staff: 13
Current project: *Galleon* (Xbox)

It's been a hard slog, but after almost four years *Galleon* is nearly ready. Gard insisted on building all his own technology – the only way he could produce the game he wanted. The result is a character called Rhama who – even with unfinished code – displays the best animation **Edge** has witnessed. Though much of the gameplay is being finely tuned *Galleon* is already looking gorgeous. Once the game is released Gard wants to strengthen his team and produce a 'very different game'.

Gard on payroll:

"There was a day when I had to say I couldn't pay the wages. I didn't much like that. I just explained to everybody, 'This is how much the bank has got. Half of you can take your money, the other half... it will bounce'"





Big Blue Box

Established: 1999
Number of games released: none
Number of staff: 14
Current project: *Project Ego* (Xbox)

Dene Carter is another ex-Bullfrogger who left for the hazards of startup development. However, the initial team – consisting of Dene Carter, Simon Carter, and Ian Lovett – were prudent enough to get the backing of Peter Molyneux and became his first satellite company. For the last 18 months the team has been coding its ambitious first title, *Project Ego* (see p30). It wants this to be a true roleplaying game in every sense, where little is signposted and the character's destiny is in the player's control.

Carter on sequels:

"We have a horrible situation in Britain and America where the only judgement a good publisher will make is how cheaply you can knock up the next iteration of a franchise. Not very forward thinking"

than retaining the company's intellectual property. "No matter how significant the characters and games seem to be at the time, you should absolutely hold on to your IP," advises Carr. "The problem with royalties is ownership. If you give someone a royalty, then they have legal ownership of part of that product. The last thing a publisher wants is ownership spread far and wide. Quite often if you go to a publisher asking for a royalty scheme and they suddenly suck in their face and go, 'Oh, no, no, no'. What we do at Mucky Foot is profit share, which is purely on good faith. Nobody here is on royalties because we wouldn't be able to get a good publishing deal."

Undercutting the nearest rival is often the difference between success and failure in startup development. Publishers are not looking for the most outlandish and exciting game to stand out in the market. Too many risks are involved, especially when an original game is being developed by a team with no track record. If a startup can prove that its driving simulator version five will get a big enough market share – and the team can produce it at less cost than another company – the chances of securing a deal are substantially increased. Various publishers offer proof-of-concept deals to those with skill and vision. A small advance is given to the team so that they can prove their mettle, but the publisher gets first rights if the game is an obvious winner. Another alternative is to develop predominantly for handheld systems, an approach which Crawfish Interactive has found particularly lucrative. But the fact that so many startups have failed has just made the climate for new development teams that bit gloomier.

Future prospects

Eighth Wonder, Pumpkin Studios, Binary Asylum – the industry is littered with startups which have failed to survive the harsh world of development. But there is some hope for the future. Molyneux's satellite strategy offers openings for new developers, while TIGA (The Independent Games Developers Association) will provide support and advice for startups. It is also hoped that TIGA will encourage investment and tax breaks through effective lobbying of the Government. But, crucially, producing original games is not about to get any easier. EA may encourage small developers to work on its licences, but producing esoteric titles is becoming ever harder – even for the more established names. "You don't get any freebies," concludes Carr. "We have to jump through the same hoops we did four years ago. There's none of this business-lunch-and sign-it-on-a-napkin bollocks. It just doesn't happen. There are just too many startup companies that have done bugger all. And that's the truth."



Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Videogames on the Edge

This month's time-gnawing e-entertainment

Gran Turismo 3: A-spec

Now that the PAL version has arrived with a squeal of tyres and an impressive screech of brakes, weekends are going missing all over the United Kingdom.



(PS2) SCEE

Super Metroid

As Samus tucks her hair into a space helmet ready for *Metroid Prime*, **Edge** revisited her haunting and dramatic third outing to savour the thrill again.



(SNES) Nintendo

Street Fighter Alpha 3

The prospect of a handheld conversion was enough to encourage **Edge** to revisit what's arguably one of Capcom's finest, fastest, and purest works.



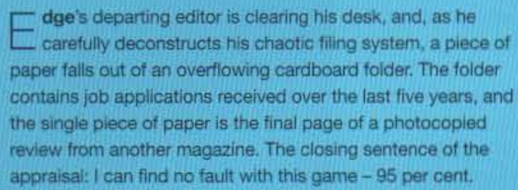
(PS) Capcom

Burning Rangers

Once again, eBay comes to the rescue of one of **Edge**'s staffers looking to complete his collection of Sonic Team-developed 32bit titles. The quest is over.



(Saturn) Sega



Score?

What is it good for?

Edge's departing editor is clearing his desk, and, as he carefully deconstructs his chaotic filing system, a piece of paper falls out of an overflowing cardboard folder. The folder contains job applications received over the last five years, and the single piece of paper is the final page of a photocopied review from another magazine. The closing sentence of the appraisal: I can find no fault with this game – 95 per cent.

What do scores mean to you? Historically speaking, **Edge** knows the answer to this. They're either utterly obnoxious summations, a signal that this very magazine regards you as an idiot who can only understand a piece of prose once the subject of it's given some kind of numeric worth. Or they're all you care about – more than the words, more than the opinions, more than the sentiments – and if they're not right, then the review's meaningless. It's been a constant in the letters page since issue zero. You're bipolar.

The only place videogame reviews appear without a defining number is the mainstream press, ironic given the generally perceived worth of their coverage within our community (which isn't to say that reputation has no grounding; **Edge** was intrigued recently to see a review of *Commandos 2* in a broadsheet, based on two-level demo code. You have to wonder whether the same paper reviews albums from single tracks, or films from trailers).

So, if they can do it, why can't **Edge**? Well, while scores are often portrayed as a get-out clause for the reviewer, they're also a crutch for the reader. Glancing down at the bottom right of the page becomes instinct. Pre-empting verbal destruction with an all-powerful figure softens the blow, softens the words, makes it easier. A four tells you a game's disappointing. You know what to expect. If the scores go, you'll have to read every word of every review. Retro-research says you don't want that. Maybe that's changed.

Regardless, for the time being at least, they stay. **Edge** toyed with the idea of placing them behind scratch-off silver for E100. Time ran out on **Edge**: perhaps that's something for the future. For now, **Edge** wants to know what scores mean to you. Email. Write. Post on **Edge-online**'s forum. The editorial team here is in two minds – bipolar, just as the letters page has always revealed you to be. We suspect you still are, but would like to know for sure.









Out Trigger

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **AM2** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**





The weapons may be a generic lot (top) but power-ups such as night vision or thermal imaging (above) are a great touch

For a nation that has traditionally shown an aversion to such a genre, Japan can produce a fine firstperson shooter when it wants to (though not wishing to completely alienate its domestic market, *Out Trigger* does offer an alternative thirdperson perspective). Fine enough, in fact, to rival what the west has spent the last ten years refining.

The most striking (and fascinating) aspect of this particular creation is the way AM2 has ingeniously incorporated typical Japanese game design and its arcade heritage with deeply rooted FPS mechanics to emerge from the R&D lab with something quite refreshing. The colourful, lively nature of the environments is violently at odds with the restrained and drab hues of most US FPS productions, and the characters, despite being a clichéd bunch, possess more personality than the assembled *Quake* series cast. But don't let the pretty visuals fool you – *Out Trigger* plays as rough as any of its US counterparts, with fast, furious action always in its sights.

AM2 has ingeniously incorporated typical Japanese game design and its arcade heritage with deeply rooted FPS mechanics

There is, however, more subtlety involved. Gunning down your enemy in a western deathmatch game results in little more than a frag point and momentary ego boost. Frag an opponent in *Out Trigger*, however, and you also get the chance to collect a coin for an extra point. It may not seem like much, but this simple additional facet has a dramatic effect on gameplay as players rush around looking to maximise their score – picking off enemies from a secluded corner may showcase your aiming prowess but is unlikely to win you the match.

Not that camping is allowed in AM2's game. Obviously realising that some of the arenas from western-developed FPSs are simply too big for deathmatch scenarios, the developer has dramatically reduced the size of the stages. Complexity, too, is affected to the extent that some of the areas in *Out Trigger* are ridiculously simplistic. Yet it works: with no place to hide, you're left with the relatively straightforward option of kill or be killed. And you certainly don't have to waste any time looking for the enemy. The result can be chaotic, certainly, but never overwhelming. Still, in the interests of balance, there are some convoluted (and large) environments later on.

Predictably, the equilibrium evident in the level design is also evident in the game's structure. In oneplayer a series of mini-missions await unlocking/completion and progression is encouraged via an increasing selection of additional characters and weapons. The repertoire is varied, ranging from shooting a specific number of terrorists in a given number of seconds to the more delicate and stealth-like pace of hostage-rescuing sorties. While the first batch will come across as nothing more than training missions, later examples should test your predatory skills in far more demanding fashion.

For the socially fashionable, the option is always going to be multiplayer. Here, *Out Trigger* has little trouble in keeping up with the competition. In terms of intensity and enjoyment, fourplayer splitscreen encounters could easily provide cover fire for the *Quake*



Another example of structure variety: *Out Trigger*'s equivalent of an-end-of-level boss shows up to put a stop to your progress. Despite the simplicity of such a level (and indeed others), gameplay doesn't suffer





Pleasingly, oneplayer missions offer a varied diet, alternating between medal collecting (left), hostage rescue-type sorties, or solitary or team-based deathmatch scenarios (right), among others













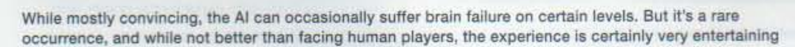


Twoplayer games aren't quite as fun as adding another two joypads (top). Expect some (admittedly rare) cases of slowdown, though. Initial missions are mostly training levels (above)

IIIs and *TimeSplitters* of this world. (US gamers also benefit from an online option, expected to be missing from the UK version. Furthermore, whether the link-up option shown at last year's E3 will at least make final PAL code is yet to be confirmed.)

Ultimately, the undeniable arcade quality does make things feel a little lightweight at times, particularly if your DC spends most of its time attached to just one joypad. The learning curve differs from typical FPS fare, but give it time and *Out Trigger* reveals itself to be wonderfully playable. This is faithful, dependable entertainment that bravely pushes a tried and tested genre into somewhat new territory with its subtle – yet significant – additions.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



While mostly convincing, the AI can occasionally suffer brain failure on certain levels. But it's a rare occurrence, and while not better than facing human players, the experience is certainly very entertaining

Taking control

Ignore the ridiculous default control option that prevents you from aiming and moving simultaneously: *Out Trigger* offers a comprehensive selection of alternatives that should cater for the majority of preferences. Force of habit ensured **Edge** opted for a *Turok*-style approach, with look set to the analogue stick and movement confined to the A, B, X, Y (with 'fire' and 'jump' on the shoulder buttons). In terms of responsiveness and feel of play, the result is as convincing as, say, DC *Quake III*.

Ephemeral Fantasia

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **September**







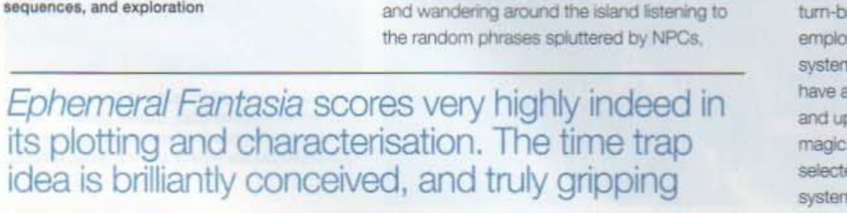


Like most RPGs the game offers three distinct elements. From the top: fight scenes, plot-development sequences, and exploration

Plot seems to be an alien concept to most western game developers – something to be chucked in at the very end of the dev cycle, after the designer has read the required texts for inspiration (Lovecraft, William Gibson, Tolkien, 'The Ladybird Book Of Celtic Myths'). In the traditional RPG, though, plot is everything – which is convenient, as guitar twanging aside, *Ephemeral Fantasia* has little else to offer.

This is the story of a small island condemned to live the same five days over and over again by an evil sorcerer named Xelpherpolis. Strangely, he's chosen the five days immediately before his wedding to the gorgeous princess Loreille for this time loop trickery, condemning himself (if this is a conservative, religious society) to an eternity of celibacy. (Surely the five days starting with the wedding night and ending halfway through the honeymoon when the arguments begin and she starts forgetting to shave her legs would have been more fun. But that's not important.) The player – taking on the role of wandering musician, Mouse – must break the loop by shaking several key characters out of the spell and recruiting them in a bid to destroy Xelpherpolis.

This recruitment process provides the meat of the middle game and requires plenty of puzzle-solving acumen as well as keen organisational skills. The game runs on its own time (one minute in *Ephemeral Fantasia* is roughly one second in real time) and potential party members all have their favourite hang-outs and daily routines which need to be learned and memorised if you want to be in the right place at the right time to get them on side. Gaining this information is a case of carefully watching the cutscenes and wandering around the island listening to the random phrases spluttered by NPCs,



Ephemeral Fantasia scores very highly indeed in its plotting and characterisation. The time trap idea is brilliantly conceived, and truly gripping

which for those unused to the conventions of the RPG is an agonisingly drawn-out procedure. It's also necessary to search just about every house, temple, school building, and shop for useful items – especially for the many map pieces, which will give you an invaluable visual guide to the island.

Accompanying this very traditional 'explore and learn' structure are two further RPG mainstays: character stats and turn-based combat. *Ephemeral Fantasia* employs a cut-down, approachable system for both. Controllable characters have access to a range of special moves and upgradeable weapons as well as magic spells, all of which can be easily selected via a 'tree diagram'-style menu system. All the characters can learn new moves as they gain experience points and can combine moves to create new specials – but you don't really need to be au fait with all of this in order to progress. Combat is so intuitive (and random encounters so mind-numbingly repetitive) that you soon learn to ignore a lot of the mechanics and let the game sort it all out itself.

What you might not be so prepared to ignore is the sheer crapness of the majority of the monsters. With names like Alex, Doug, Walking Flower and Manchester, they couldn't terrorise an infant school daytrip let alone a seasoned gamer. While this is a light-hearted RPG, expecting players to repeatedly battle giant rabbits, slugs, beetles and moles is perhaps taking things a bit far, especially as most are merely flat-shaded blobs that limp through each scene like rejects from a never-made Aardman animation.

In fact across the board, *Ephemeral Fantasia* is a visual disappointment. Cutscenes are colourful and have a certain anime chic, but there's nothing here that couldn't be easily achieved on a Dreamcast (casual observers might even mistake the game for a PS1 title). Even the spell effects – where RPGs usually show off a bit – are limp.

But, as discussed earlier, where



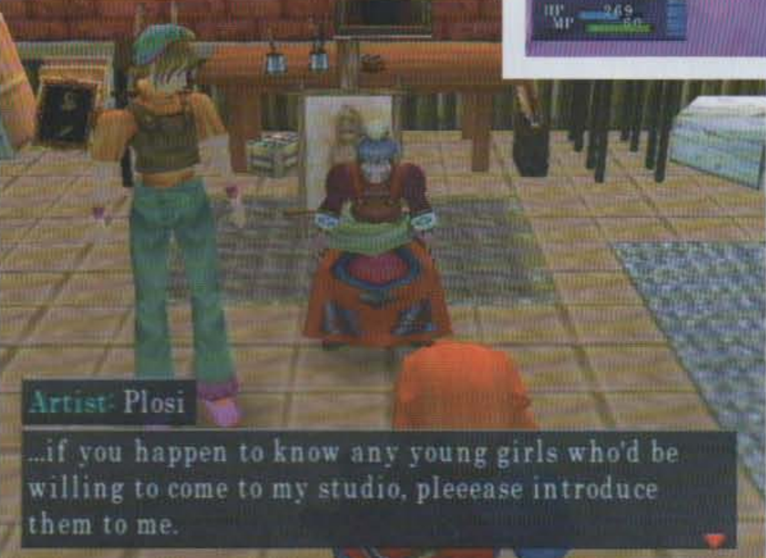
Most of the artists' time and effort has gone into creating gorgeous female characters. Disappointingly, though, none seems to have been saved for the magic effects, as this limp ritual scene demonstrates

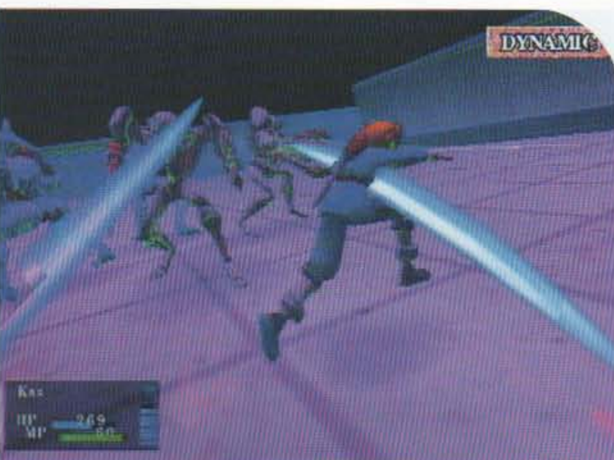


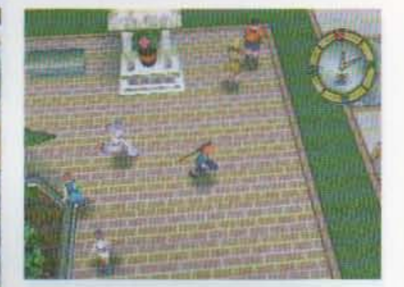










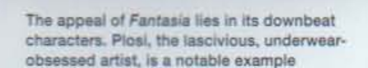




Ephemeral Fantasia scores very highly indeed is in its plotting and characterisation. The time trap idea is brilliantly conceived, and, while you're making progress, truly gripping. The cutscenes are filed with cheeky, bawdy humour (in typical manga style, the female characters bear the brunt of it), and recruits are a bunch of drunken losers. Rummy, the statuesque royal guard, for example, can only be converted to your cause when you accompany her on an all-night drinking binge. Meanwhile, Claire the watchmaker just about lives in the pub, and Kyte the sailor spends his nights getting sloshed with the lads and his days, well, hanging about at the docks brandishing a huge swordfish. The game is filled with illogical, surreal, and daft moments that would be immediately cut from a British game, lest the target market didn't understand straight off the bat.

Ephemeral Fantasia is unlikely to convert PlayStation2 owners to the traditional RPG – if only because it doesn't look like a cutting-edge title. This is a pity, as there is a big game hiding beneath the rather shoddy, rushed façade, with around 12 characters to recruit, loads of sub-quests, some excellent puzzles, and decent boss battles later on. Forget the guitar element – it's just a tacked on sideshow to promote a gimmicky peripheral. What you should check this game out for are its humour and its plot – two elements that will never be improved by a new-fangled chipset promoted with misleading marketing spin.

Edge rating: Six out of ten


The appeal of *Fantasia* lies in its downbeat characters. Plosi, the lascivious, underwear-obsessed artist, is a notable example

When a new character is recruited, you get this touching lightshow (above). They can then be called on throughout the game



Hope you like jamming too

As the lead character in *Ephemeral Fantasia* is a musician, Konami has grabbed the chance to exploit its guitar controller for a series of rhythm-action sub-games. Through the adventure you learn several songs which can be strummed to impress recruitable characters (you also need to play at the royal wedding which forms the focus of the game). However, even if you play badly, the plot is usually unaffected. Good fun for *Guitar Freaks* fans, though.

Ka

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **Zoom** Price: **¥6,800 (£39)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**









While there's obviously a voyeuristic element to *Ka*, level four develops the theme. As the household's 17-year-old daughter dozes in the bath, the mosquito takes advantage









Once a spot in the room is targeted, pressing circle initiates a burst of speed towards the target. Sucking blood involves circling the right analogue stick at a constantly changing rate of revolution

Heartbeat hints

A heart monitor in the bottom left of the screen indicates the humans' awareness of your presence. If it turns red, they'll notice you, and the game structure will move into Battle mode. Several spots are illuminated on your opponent's body, and until you manage to bite all of them, they'll make increasingly outlandish attempts on your insect life. The length of time it takes you to subdue them is recorded, and rewards (in the shape of brand-new mosquito colours) are given for fast times.

The idea's captivating: a sitcom-style family find themselves under invisible attack from a cartoon mosquito. The humans rest, the mosquito zips towards them, bites and sucks. The mosquito drinks too long, too carelessly, and the victim notices. They mindlessly swat, it dies, the game restarts, and the player keeps trying until the bloodsucker drinks its fill. Just like real life, then, except here the player is the buzzer, and the PS2 plays the part of the clumsy selfish human blood-hoarder. Call this biteback catharsis, then.

Control is as you might expect, with the triggers controlling velocity and the analogue sticks controlling movement. Each human hides at least one bloodsucking target, highlighted with the insect equivalent of a head-up display. Other key points – light switches, mobile phones, and so on – are also marked, and sometimes must be triggered to manoeuvre the victim into a biteable position. When the target's within range, circle executes a high-speed dash towards it, whereupon the blood sucking mini-game begins. Then it's simple: sate yourself, and move to the next level.

Exploration of each room is part of *Ka*'s charm, and while the environments are disappointingly confined, the use of collectibles ensures that each is thoroughly examined. Dotted around the levels are tiny health-giving hearts, larger confectionery pick-ups, and extra empty vials of blood that can be filled for bonuses once the level itself has been completed. It's a neat idea, but let down by sloppy implementation: there's no indication of where the bonuses might be, or how many of them remain to be collected on each level.

Still, the thing that really breaks *Ka* – or it least stops it from being the success an idea like this warrants – is the right-angled difficulty curve. There are 12 levels, and one to ten are far too simple. Then level 11 hits, the father starts throwing Hadoken-style fireballs, and your mosquito's aflame within seconds. Fine, but there's no instant restart, and the PS2's cancerous loading times eat away at the game so much that finding the enthusiasm to conquer this single challenging moment is difficult. That's a shame, because *Ka*'s blood-pumping uniqueness means it's bound to attract some bug-eyed gamers. They'll bite down on the rich vein of originality, but they'll probably leave unsatisfied.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

City Crisis

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Take 2** Developer: **Syscom Entertainment** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

You can almost imagine Michael Buerk's voiceover accompanying the drama. "Just look at this fool," he says with mock concern. "Smoking illegal substances is a despicable crime… but in the forecourt of a petrol station? Now that's evil." *City Crisis* provides scenarios which will be instantly familiar to any fan of disaster television. School lab experiments going horribly wrong; a hijacked bus fishtailing its way through the city streets; earthquakes levelling whole communities – it's just another day for the air rescue team.

City Crisis is a well-constructed and delicately designed game. The city itself exudes a cartoon charm, with buildings – from the local fairground rides to the school's sports arena – almost crying out to be enveloped in licks of flame. Stranded victims lean out of verandas, take to the roofs, and dangle precariously from electricity pylons. Recover a bandaged victim from a hospital fire and he will waggle his crutches in appreciation. These are the small touches which make *City Crisis* enjoyable.

There are three craft which can be piloted, and in traditional fashion each has key strengths and weaknesses. Instruments include water rockets which can quell the larger flames, and a water spray to finish off the remaining orange tendrils. A winch cable can be lowered to pick up distressed citizens, and the L2 button hovers the helicopter for stability. Control is excellent and is certainly an improvement over the unwieldy *Air Ranger* (**E**98).

But like dodgy hand-cam footage of people sitting in trees during high floods, the formula soon becomes tiresome. Three mission modes are offered: Rescue, Chase, and Time Attack. Only five missions are available in Rescue, with two in Chase, and three in Time Attack. Complete the majority of the missions with an 'A' rating and the final rescue opens up. It was expected – given that it takes just three hours it takes to unlock this – that the finale would offer a substantial challenge. But although the entire city suffers a cruel earthquake it doesn't take long to recover the necessary 20 individuals to complete the game. Unfortunately, the frugal amount of missions are unlocked too rapidly and there is little incentive to go back for higher scores. More variety and a deeper mission structure would have saved this game from its inevitable obscurity.

Edge rating: Five out of ten









Each helicopter is supplied with water rockets and a water spray. Large fires can be targeted with the rockets to reduce much of the danger. The small licks of flame can then be extinguished with the delicate water spray





Hot cold meats

A deli has been robbed and the getaway driver is running amok in the city. Unfortunately for the police the vehicle is a red sports car capable of easily evading their pursuit. The missions in *City Crisis* are nothing if not imaginative. By using your searchlight to target the driver the police can easily home in his route through the streets. It's just a pity that the game is so short lived.

In the final mission the whole city is left crumbling from a surprise earthquake. Under strict time pressure 20 of the 30 survivors must be rescued for success

Twisted Metal Black

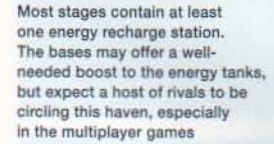
Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: SCEA Developer: Incognito Price: $50 (£35) Release: Out now (US) TBC (UK)











Most stages contain at least one energy recharge station. The bases may offer a well-needed boost to the energy tanks, but expect a host of rivals to be circling this haven, especially in the multiplayer games





The individuality of the characters comes through in their special attacks. Bloody Mary's screaming fiery missile (above) relentlessly follows its target – even going so far as to burrow underground – until it impacts on the enemy. It's fun but unsubtle mayhem



Combi combos

The array of weapons available to each character are further augmented by special energy attacks. These are triggered by performing *Streetfighter II*-style command combos. In the heat of a battle they are difficult to execute, but once an enemy has been paralysed by the freeze attack you will never look back.

Paul Bartel's engaging satire 'Death Race 2000' may have inspired a host of vehicle combat games, but none of them introduce any elements of the film's subtler moments. Faced with the choice of hi-scoring old age pensioners or the nurses which callously roll them out into the street, developers would seemingly go for the easy points every time. But while *Twisted Metal Black* offers little in the way of sophistication, it does deliver a good deal of enjoyable knockabout destruction.

Those who enjoy short bursts of manic action peppered with gleeful explosions and little strategy will find much here to entertain. Vehicle handling is frenetically fast, and though this matches the overall feel of the game, it makes tracking enemies more irritating than necessary. Similarly, Incognito's decision to go for hyper-realism is no excuse for giving the vehicles little sense of grip or weight. To compensate, though, most missiles have homing capabilities, and the variety of weapons offered is laudable. But although a dark aspect (in keeping with the post apocalyptic setting) has been given to most arenas, more variety in terms of colour and lighting would have improved visibility.

The game is well structured and presented, with options for multiplayer, twoplayer, and oneplayer experiences. In Story mode you must choose one of the games anti-heroes and take him, her, or it through eight arenas. Ten characters are available from the start, with more to unlock as the game progresses. Though the individual storylines – delivered through FMV – rank little higher than the ramblings of thrash metal album lyrics, each character has an individuality which comes out through their vehicle characteristics and special attacks. Sweet Tooth's missile-heavy and transformable ice-cream van is perhaps the most impressive.

Levels are incredibly expansive, and can be further opened up through diligent exploration. Pick-ups, including health and speed boosts, are generously provided for, and there are limited energy recharge points in strategic locations. It is disappointing, however, that the finely tuned oneplayer experience is let down by the multiplayer components. Unfortunately, in splitscreen mode the bouts suffer in terms of speed, adding little to the fun if shallow oneplayer warfare.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Gitarooman

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Koei** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800(£39)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Cynics sigh: the same old rhythm action. The plot's fantastical as always – beret-wearing miserablist proves hero, thanks to the power of music, a secretly robotic dog, and a futuristic space guitar – and it's graphically stunning, with a captivatingly kinetic intro sequence and post-Greenblat visuals by Japanese artist 326. But it's still rhythm action, and beat-coding developers don't have to spend time thinking about the game dynamic, do they? Cynics should play *Gitarooman* before they dismiss a genre that continues to evolve and impress.

Just as *Cool Cool Toon* took *PaRappa* and introduced the Dreamcast's analogue stick, so *Gitarooman* stretches the much-maligned rhythm-action structure once more. Divided into two styles which switch and intercut throughout the game's ten levels, half of the game sees you in pure *PaRappa* mode, pressing the appropriate buttons as markers speed through the screen's centre point. The other element, signifying the lead character's guitar playing, is somewhat different. The player tracks a constantly snaking line with the left analogue stick, pressing and holding the circle button at hightlighted points. The two separate hand movements – rhythm with the right, bending the sound with left – provide a convincing DualShock approximation of guitar mechanics, key to the game's success.

Perhaps it's this complexity that's also *Gitarooman*'s (partial) undoing. Rather than instantly reacting to button presses, the guitar sounds here fade in and out depending on how well the rhythm is matched. While the feeling of hitting a riff perfectly and hearing the noise warp around a daunting S-curve is sublime, the lack of negative feedback is disconcerting and disappointing. If a note is missed, there's no aural feedback akin to *PaRappa*'s characteristic yelps, nor is there the opportunity to improvise for extra credit.

But the cynics can stop smiling, because there's enough here to imply the genre's far from finished: duelling guitars in the four-player mode, multiple routes through several levels, a wide range of musical styles and, above all, an exuberance only surpassed by Treasure's *Freak Out*. *PaRappa* fans may start to question their loyalties towards Matsuura's brand because, while *Gitarooman*'s not faultless, it's certainly a step forward, and one the doggy sequel will have trouble surpassing.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



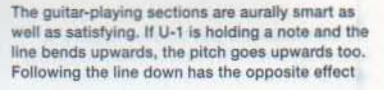






A musical mixed bag

U-1's axe-wielding technique goes beyond the traditional J-pop of the intro screen. Level three sees him fighting keyboard-laden UFO's with some poppy techno, level three takes the battle to the swamps and some smooth jazz guitar, and level four discards the guitar entirely as our hero flees from an underwater drum'n'bass fetishist. Dub, church-of-noise metal, and mariachi also make an appearance, but **Edge's** highlight has to be the gentle acoustic sunset number. Play well and U-1's girl will admire him with big doe eyes. Play badly and she'll just walk away.



The guitar-playing sections are aurally smart as well as satisfying. If U-1 is holding a note and the line bends upwards, the pitch goes upwards too. Following the line down has the opposite effect







Levels are divided into several sections. During Charge, U-1 plays his guitar to increase his energy bar. Guard is hitting the right symbols to avoid enemy attacks, and Attack means strumming for enemy pain

Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscura

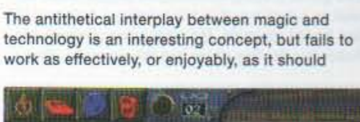
Format: **PC** Publisher: **Sierra** Developer: **Troika Games** Price: **£35** Release: **August 24**



Freaky control

The inability to directly control a player's party members proves problematic throughout the game, but nowhere is this more apparent than in combat, which is frequently unnecessarily harsh and of fundamentally limited elegance. The implementation of a *Baldur's Gate*-style pause function proves almost redundant, as the turn-based combat that ensues is a reductive and overly simplistic affair. This is compounded by a heavy-handed emphasis on combat, which also limits the freeform appeal of the panoply of different character types that would otherwise add depth to the game.



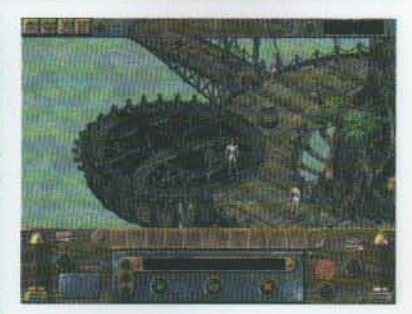






The antithetical interplay between magic and technology is an interesting concept, but fails to work as effectively, or enjoyably, as it should







Getting the most out of *Arcanum* is a laborious process thanks to an unwieldy interface and a structure that fails to create any sort of dynamic pace. Next to Bioware's RPG outings it looks distinctly antique

As a genre, steampunk hasn't exactly been overexploited by the development community, so *Arcanum*'s distinctive blend of Victoriana and Tolkien consequently represents a refreshing change from the mass of stolidly dystopian or fantastic environments that populate the videogame RPG universe. Having been developed by the team responsible for *Fallout*, it also boasts a respectable heritage. But, apparently unnoticed by Troika, the bar has, in the intervening years, been raised by the likes of *Baldur's Gate* and *Planescape*.

Gamers who have had their horizons expanded by such titles need to overcome several hurdles before the getting anywhere near enjoying *Arcanum*'s unique atmosphere. The first is the comprehensive but sprawling ruleset that needs to be mastered before commencing play. Although this bears some similarity to that employed in the original *Fallout*, the game still can't draw upon a captive, rule-savvy audience in the same way that *Baldur's Gate* can, for example, and nor does it hide the underlying mechanics in the sophisticated manner of Bioware's titles.

Throughout the game the unwieldy and flabby interface conspires to thwart the player's attempts to get to grips with the game universe. Managing inventory could be a game in itself – trying to rearrange items on a grid to accommodate a switch between a rifle (seven squares across) and an enchanted sword (five squares down) can prove an intriguing challenge for players with a full inventory – were it not for the poorly implemented mouse controls. Likewise, exploration through sprawling maps isn't made any easier by three levels of navigation, which is unforgivable for a game that requires players to be so peripatetic. And it is slightly unfortunate that the painstaking inclusion of a plethora of Victorian bric-a-brac fails in its evocation of a believable alternate world, or in its support for a combinatorial power-up system, because the range on offer is simply too diverse and difficult to administer.

All of this is a shame, because the narrative and the selection of side quests on offer are diverting enough. But it's indicative that even here, there is too much reliance on appropriating the external characteristics of tried-and-tested RPG mechanics without maintaining the internal balance of incentive structure that is achieved in the best examples of the genre.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Yanya Caballista featuring Gawoo

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Koei** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥4,800 (£27)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Look at the screenshots. Form your first impressions. Lesson one for the would-be buyer: sometimes preconceptions are accurate, and thus there's barely any point in talking this one through. *Yanya Caballista* is faded *Jet Set Radio*-lite, stripped of passion, style, and enthusiasm.

Pallid mimicry at its worst, Koei's spin on *JSR*'s joy is placing a fractionally firmer emphasis on mid-air aerobics. A comprehensive suite of training/challenge levels – consider them *Caballista*'s extended version of *Crazy Taxi*'s Crazy Box – ease the player into the four-wheeled action and provide much of the potential playtime, with the rest coming in five larger, multiple-goal arenas. Unlike *JSR*, that goal has little artistic merit or dubious legality: rather than just appropriating Smilebit's tagging system, Koei makes its skaters play ghostbuster.

And that's where the tricks come in. As the player's chosen boarder leaps from, through, or into the immediate vicinity of a ghost, simple stunts must be performed. If they're successfully landed, the target loses an amount of health proportional to the complexity of the trick. If the trick's difficult enough, the spirit will evaporate. While the idea's unspectacular, it's acceptable. The input system isn't.

Just like ASCII's *Surfroid*, control comes via a miniature deck that stretches across both DualShock analogue sticks. The player is instructed to hold the controller vertically so the orientation matches that of the board on the screen, but the DualShock wasn't designed to be held like that, and even a short period of play reveals the consequences: *Yanya Caballista*'s control method pushes wrists and thumbs into uncomfortable positions. While control innovation is something that ought to be admired, designing something that only produces frustration and discomfort will limit admiration to masochists and idiots.

For those prepared to suffer, there's also a passable twoplayer game and a short but cleverly worked Trick mode. It doesn't matter. What could have been a rival to *Jet Set Radio Future* is actually lesson two, this time for potentially derivative developers: if your grand design schematic is to imitate, make sure your game doesn't lie so painfully in the shadow of your inspiration. If it does, it'll take much more than an equally painful control gimmick to rescue it.

Edge rating: Three out of ten









Characters are locked to rails as soon as they make contact, rather than requiring balance and adjustment like the more demanding *SSX*



Shabby shading

Koei's decision to cel-shade *Yanya Caballista* is hardly a surprising one, but it certainly doesn't work in its favour. A year on from *Jet Set Radio*'s stunning introduction to the technique it's disappointing to see exactly how much worse an ethically identical game can look on a console that's supposedly more powerful. The horrifyingly jagged edges visible at the TGS appear to have been smoothed over, but the characters appear indistinct and featureless. Textures are bland and uninspiring, but it's the design that's really lacking, especially in a game that gives so much potential to would-be style leaders.



A trick's success and power is illustrated by an array of spectacular visual effects, as well as the impact it has on the victim's energy bar. Some ghosts can only defeated with grabs, while others only succumb to flips

Street Fighter II X Revival

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥4,800 (£27)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**





Fans of the barrel and car destruction bonus stages will be pleased to note their reappearance, although the lack of any hi-score table is a disappointment



Some of the original game's backgrounds have been reworked for the handheld incarnation. As ever, the characters' special moves require dextrous finger movements and, preferably, smaller than average hands

Hardcore Capcom fans will be pleased to notice this isn't the expected conversion of the Super Nintendo's version of *Turbo* but a revival of the arcade X, which means super special moves and the presence of Gouki and Shin Gouki for persistent battlers. The core experience is the same as ever: forgive the fractional frame loss and savour the experience.

Time's been kind to *SFII*; it's still fast, still flows. Those who've adapted quickly to the GBA's cramped controls will profit, since success is largely dependant on nimble fingers and quick reactions. The game defaults to hard punches and kicks on the shoulder buttons, and light strikes on the face. Purists can configure medium-strength blows to combinations or lengthier presses; newcomers can set special moves to simpler sequences than the traditional quarter rotations.

Unsurprisingly, it's probably the best portable beat 'em up ever, although *Capcom Vs SNK* on the Neo-Geo Pocket Color is in the race. Would-be buyers might also want to consider Crawfish's upcoming port of *Zero 3*. While it's disheartening to look at the GBA roster and see little other than retro re-releases, when they're this good, it's largely forgivable.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Super Dodge Ball Advance

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Atlus** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$40 (£28)** Release: **Out now (US) TBC (UK)**

One of those odd sports that rarely – gym classes aside – makes an appearance in Britain, dodge ball's cross-format digital conversion has always been well received in Japan. Now the carefully violent sport reaches GBA to great expectations, particularly to an American public whose last taste of localised *Super Dodge Ball* was on the NES back in '88. Disappointingly, though, *Super Dodge Ball Advance* owes more to Technos Japan's 8bit game than its more complex Super Famicom brother.

Controlling a team of hopefuls, the player's objective is to rise up the rankings using swift passing, aggressive throwing, and instinctive ducking. Since putting your opponent under pressure is impossible, the game becomes, essentially, turn based. So there's little sense of pace or urgency, and while wreaking havoc on opponents with comically violent special moves is satisfying, success often feels arbitrary. Which isn't to say the game's difficult; once you've mastered the requisite quick passing, success is all but assured. As ever, the game's some fun in link-up mode, but not nearly entertaining enough to make the title anything more than a curiosity.

Edge rating: Four out of ten





Special moves, illustrated by the ball turning a light shade of blue, differ from character to character. However, there's rarely any subtlety in their use



Button A passes or ducks, B attacks or catches, and pressing both makes the miniature athletes leap supernaturally high. Time your throws, and your character will perform a signature move

Cheats prosper

Grant Hughes, marketing manager, Datel





Reverse-engineering prowess and fast turnaround times are proving profitable for game-enhancement specialist Datel





Game Studio is a Game Boy Color emulator for PlayStation2 which enables users to tilt the virtual screen

"We try to steer clear of the duller peripherals," say **Grant Hughes**, marketing manager of UK firm Datel. And with an annual turnover in excess of £100m, the company's innovative approach to cheat cartridges is certainly paying off.

"We have presence in Europe, Japan and US," Hughes points out. "In the States, we do the Game Shark range for InterAct. In Europe people look down on cheats a bit, but in the States it's a recognised part of gaming. Rather than cheat cartridges, they call them game enhancers." But where talk of cheat cartridges summons up images of ageing plug-ins for 8bit Nintendo consoles, Datel's products range from sophisticated Game Boy emulators to USB keyboards, hubs, and DVD remote controls, as well as oddities such as its PS2 FM radio.

"Our main product is Action Replay, which comes out for every console. We're currently the only company with a cheat cartridge for PlayStation2," boasts Hughes. The next iteration of the PlayStation2 version will offer import DVD playback, support for Internet downloads of codes, save file compression, and USB keyboard support – all in addition to the basic cheat codes library that provides gamers with infinite lives, all weapons, and level-skipping abilities. A version for Game Boy Advance, GBX, is also in the final stages of development.

Another soon-to-be-big product for the company is Game Studio, a Game Boy Color emulator for PlayStation2. "We thought it was a good solution to the lack of games on the platform," laughs Hughes. But Game Studio is much more than just a way of getting Game Boy games onto a big screen. "We did a Game Boy emulator on PlayStation and N64, but this is the first time we have done colour. We've also been able to take advantage of features like PlayStation2's bilinear filtering for smoother edges and CD-quality sound," he says.

Bizarrely, because the emulation uses full 32bit alpha-blended textures, it's even possible to tilt the virtual screen, giving an impression of depth – useful for games such as *Zelda* and *Pokémon*. High-colour games are fully supported, while a snapshot feature means players can save a game at any point. At the very least, it's an impressive technical achievement that underlines Datel's ingenuity at reverse engineering the efforts of hardware manufacturers.

"We always get asked about our relationship with Sony and Nintendo," says **Mike Connors**, Datel's managing director. "The fact is we would never do anything that could threaten their revenue. There's no point because Datel only does well when Sony and Nintendo do well. We have to go to great lengths to make sure our products only works with original games. In a way we are anarchists but with rules."

As for the future, according to Hughes it's looking bright: "We have invested $2million in DVD9 machinery so we can produce products for XBox and GameCube."

Keeping it in the family

With three facilities and more than 100,000 square feet of space, Datel's Stone HQ graphically demonstrates the scale of its ambitions. "Speed to market is everything," explains MD Mike Connors. "You need the product to be there when the game is out. When you buy a game, you are going to want to cheat at it within the next week when your interest in the game is at its highest. That's why we need vertically integrated services."

Virtually all of Datel's business, from R&D to the manufacture of CDs and videos, packaging materials and injection moulding, is carried out within in-house facilities. It even has a two video-editing post-production suites, together with a blue-screen studio.

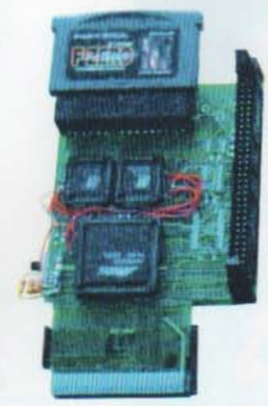


Datel's in-house facilities include CD and video mastering and manufacturing production lines



URL
www.datel.co.uk











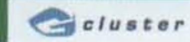
Datel's Game Boy Advance cheat cartridge has steadily evolved (left to right), and promises to be another winner for the company

PC gaming goes handheld

Finnish wireless company G-cluster has the power to bring the PC out of the bedroom and into the open

Mika Peltola, CEO, G-cluster





URL

www.g-cluster.com

One of the first developers to sign up is Kaboom's Attention To Detail with its *Lego Racer* and *Dogs Of War* games

"I want the James Bond hollowed-out mountain full of computers," jokes **Mika Peltola**, CEO of Finnish wireless technology company G-cluster. Standing in the corner of the Helsinki-startup's offices is a mundane-looking stack of beige boxes, topped by a small Wireless Local Area Network (W-LAN) basestation. It hardly ranks as mountainous, but the G-cluster, from which the company takes its name, is nonetheless a powerful piece of kit. At its foot sit six iPAQ PDAs, each equipped with W-LAN cards, which Peltola refers to as G-screens.

"The only way to make a cheap gaming terminal is to do as little processing locally as possible," he says, explaining the philosophy behind G-cluster. Simply put, the main server (the cluster) deals with the majority processing needed for 3D multiplayer gaming, relying on the high bandwidth connection such as W-LAN, EGDE or a 3G network to update the clients (G-screens) as to player position and other game-related data.

With lack of processing a problem that bedevils gaming on many devices ranging from mobile phones to PDAs and set-top boxes, the potential applications for G-cluster are numerous. Peltola is keen to point out that although the system is currently running on iPAQs, it can be used on any device with enough processing power and network capabilities, including next-generation mobile phones.







The heart of the system is the G-cluster stack, which carries out most of the processing required to run a game and then transmits the relevant data to the client handsets. Each basestation has a range of around 25 metres and can typically run up to 20 G-screens



"We have stumbled into a lot of markets," he confirms. "At E3 we realised that our technology has tremendous potential in a number of areas, ranging from hotel room entertainment to in-car and in-flight entertainment." Other areas of interest include deploying the handsets in amusement parks to combat the boredom of people waiting in queues. Coffee shops such as Starbucks are also looking in the practicality of letting customers hire the G-screens and accompanying headphones to play games while sinking a latte.

As for the fabled next-generation 3G mobile phone networks, Peltola takes a pragmatic approach. "I think 3G will start out a hotspot solution. You will have city centres, hotels, airports wired up with fat pipes and it will gradually spread out from there," he says. The infrastructure is already being rolled out in Finland and the most-wired parts of the US. G-cluster has a partnership with Finnish mobile carrier Sonera and expects to be carrying out trials in downtown Helsinki during August. Each area would typically have 20 G-screens, the W-LAN basestation, a broadband Internet connection, and a credit card reader.

But perhaps the most exciting feature of the technology is that it works for any multiplayer or oneplayer PC game with only minor modifications. The open-source *Quake* engine proved the concept, with Kaboom Studios one of the first developers to sign up. Its *Lego Racer* and *Dogs Of War* titles are already up and running. Elixir Studios is another content partner. Obviously issues such as control make it more suitable for some game types over others, but it has great potential.

"I think the dream of publishers is to control their distribution chain," says Peltola, looking to the future. "If you think of this whole landscape from the perception of someone like Infogrames or EA, it looks pretty damn interesting, because they can lever their content in these non-PC environments and they don't have to deal with the distribution chain or hardware licence fees."

How to get a head in gaming

Matrox's G550 offers the world's first hardware-accelerated 3D facial animation communication

matrox







One of the key components in Matrox's *HeadCasting* engine is Digimask's 3D head technology

URL
www.matrox.com



Canadian graphics specialist Matrox has maintained its reputation for solid if unflashy products. Where the others have gone for brutal rendering power, it has taken a more lateral approach, being the first company to support the environment-mapped bump mapping and dual-monitor technology.

Its latest component, the G550, continues this philosophy. "The G550 is the first graphics accelerator to introduce Visual Online Communications," explains **Kamran Ahmed**, senior product manager at Matrox. "The main feature of the chip is the *HeadCasting* engine, which allows users to communicate online using 3D visuals."

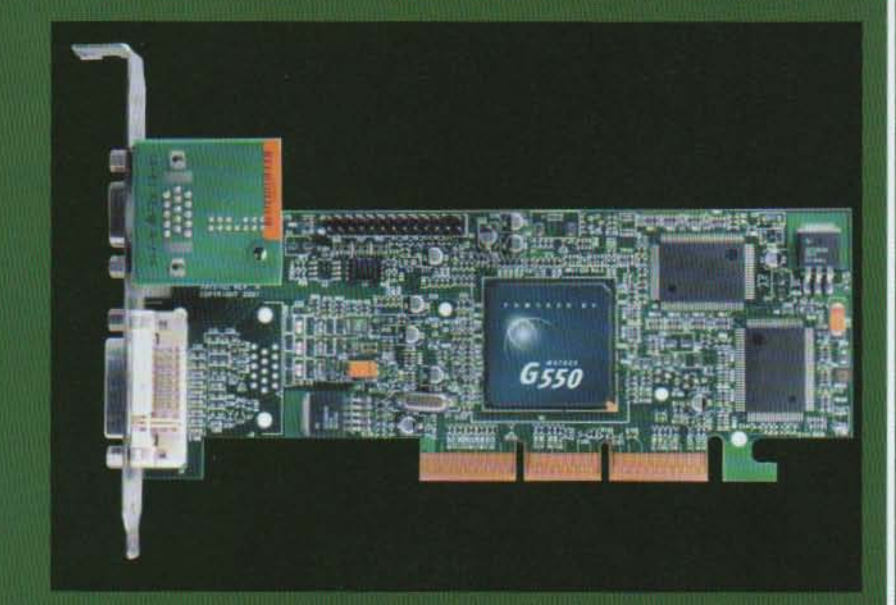
According to Matrox, one of the key growth areas for the domestic use of PCs is online communications such as Instant Messaging, ICQ, and Voice-over IP applications. Ideally, the next step for this technology would be to integrate streaming video, but this is impossible because of current bandwidth restrictions. What Matrox is espousing, therefore, is a kind of halfway-house approach.

In conjunction with strategic partners Digimask and LipSinc, the *HeadCasting* engine in the G550 allows users to interact online using their 3D Digimask heads, which are animated and lipsynched in realtime via streaming voice data over a 56K-modem connection. "Analysis of the audio and converting it into deformation data for animation takes place on the CPU, which provides benefits for users with faster CPUs and low bandwidth Internet connections," says Ahmed. "The only other thing that comes over the Internet is the Digimask head, which is between 300K and 500K. This is sent once at the start of session."

This may not sound difficult to do, but the key issue is the size of the head to be animated. For most gaming applications the percentage of the screen taken up by a Digimask face is tiny, particularly when compared to chat or remote-training applications.

The face is also a difficult object to accurately animate. Thanks to an extended DirectX 8 vertex shader, Matrox uses fast 32-matrix palette skinning (MPS), which models the facial skin as a mesh deformed by the actions of transform matrices which acts as muscles. The standard implementation of DirectX 8 only deals with up to 96 constant registers, though – these are caches for uploading the new muscle positions for each animation. If there are not enough to deal with the complete mesh, it has to be broken down into a complex patchwork of parts depending on which muscles are influencing the different parts of the mesh. For this reason, the facial animation requires the hardware acceleration of the *HeadCasting* engine. It contains 256 constant registers allowing the facial mesh to be updated as a single entity once per pass.

More important than these technical issues, nevertheless, is the question of whether the general public would rather talk 'direct' than chat on the Internet. Matrox is sure it will, and is also pushing its product's potential in the business market. It has developed its own application for the G550 – *Virtual Presentator* for PowerPoint. This can be used to create a talking-head presentation which plays alongside the standard *PowerPoint* slides. Cleverly, you don't need a G550 to play back the presentation, although the quality is lower on a non-*HeadCasting* PC as it has to render using software. You do need a G550 to author a presentation, however. Other bundled software with the board includes a buddypack containing *Digimask* and LipSinc's *HeadFone* software, so users can start chatting online with their friends immediately.



Card tricks

The G550 (above) is a superset of Matrox's existing 0.18 micron G450 graphics card, but has had its texturing capabilities doubled so it can now manage two dual-textured pixels per clock using Matrox Vibrant Colour Quality architecture in 32bit colour. It supports environment-mapped bump mapping, DualHead outputs, 4x AGP, and comes with 32Mb of RAM. As a massmarket part, it only costs £95 and continues to benefit from Matrox's rock-solid unified drivers.

Cash-U cashes in

Mobile gaming revenues have proved a slow burner but platform vendor Cash-U says its SMS developers are quids in



URL
www.cash-u.com

Unlike some other platforms, Pecan supports SMS, WAP, J2ME and 3G services. Interestingly, it is only SMS which is currently making money

Operation & Service Layer: End User Portal | OSS | Customer Care | Rating Engine
Core Server Layer: Application Server | User Management | Central DB
Connectivity Layer: SMS Gateway | Web I/O Web Server | Web I/O Web Server | 3G GPRS
SMSC | WAP | WEB

Mobile phones are no longer cool. Handset prices have soared, networks are in the dock over international roaming charges, the financial markets have drastically lost their enthusiasm for the whole industry, and – surprise, surprise – no one is playing WAP games. There is still life under the surface, however.

"We have four commercial installations generating real revenue. In one month, Italian network Omnitel generated five million SMSs from gaming using our server. That's $500,000 [£355,000]," enthuses **Rann Smorodinsky**, VP business development at Israeli mobile technology startup Cash-U.

Unlike other mobile platform providers, Cash-U concentrates on technology. It doesn't develop any content itself, nor does it get involved in issues such as marketing to consumers. It tries to be as transparent as possible. "We focus on technology. We believe we are experts at giving service providers and networks telecom-grade software to run entertainment and enhanced messaging," says Smorodinsky.

Cash-U has signed a reseller's agreement with Motorola, which sees its Pecan server labelled as the American giant's preferred solution. It's also generating revenue from the mobile industry's favourite little helper, SMS.

"When we were designing the platform, we decided to be compliant with SMS alongside technologies such as J2ME and WAP," Smorodinsky recalls. Other companies finding SMS to be a lucrative niche in the barren desert of WAP include Finnish ringtone specialist Akumiitti. In contrast, Nokia's Mobile Entertainment Server doesn't support the technology.

But more surprising than the revelation of money generation is the fact that developers who have signed games to operators through Cash-U are getting paid too. "I can show you game developers who have got cheques through us from Omnitel for between $20,000 [£14,000] to $5,000 [£3,500] depending on how successful the games are," he says. "It's not the dream, it's here now."

Cash-U has agreements with around 30 developers, and runs regular SDK conferences, which have been attended by the likes of Morpheme, THQ and Wired Realms. "We don't ask them to be exclusive to us," Smorodinsky explains. "Most of them don't want to invest time in too many platforms, so it's usually an exclusive agreement. I don't mind if a developer who is creating a specific game concept for our SDK develops it for Digital Bridges as well. I don't want to tie the likes of Kuju down. It went through our SDK course, and also work with Nokia. It's not a problem."



Cash-U concentrates on the functionality of its Java-based Pecan wireless game platform and has no in-house development capability



The Mobile Entertainment Forum brings together mobile gaming specialists such as Cash-U and Digital Bridges to take the industry forward

Life by committee

The western mobile telecoms business has always operated through a strange mixture of co-operation and competition. The latest examples are the Mobile Games Interoperability (MGI) forum and the Mobile Entertainment Forum (MEF). The former is the result of Nokia finally joining the Motorola, Ericsson, and Siemens platform initiative (see Codeshop, **E**97). It will focus on ensuring standardisation of game technology.

The MEF sees game specialists such as Digital Bridges, Picofun and Cash-U come together to deal with issues such as technology, platforms, media and relationships with network operators.

"We are very supportive of the Forum. We want to encourage developers into the market and we do this by making sure Cash-U is interoperable with Digital Bridges, Nokia and others," says Ramm Smorodinsky, who is the MEF's vice chairperson.

Issues of competition do arise, however. "Obviously the things that are good about our technology, we think will also be good for the standard," Smorodinsky says. But while there will be jostling for position with the forum, the industry is growing so fast that there should be enough pie to go round.

Diary of a videogame

Brain In A Jar reflects on E3 and its relevance to bringing a game to life

Brain In A Jar diary, part seven
by designer Nigel Kershaw



The post-E3 buzz has faded, settling down into the day-to-day routine of sourcing a deal. Matt's sterling legwork in Los Angeles and his bevy of good meetings with a score of publishers means that we have had plenty of following up to do, which is always the tricky part. Prowling the E3 floor getting sleep-deprived and hungover publishers to proclaim you as the next gaming messiah is the easy bit. Getting them to part with some cash after the show is a different story. This contrast between publisher attitude during and after trade shows is quite a fascinating thing to behold, and it never ceases to amaze how superficial these events can be when it comes to doing business.

I think the E3 business model can be easily summed up: smile, shake hands, say how wonderful the technology/concept/graphics/demo/game are/is, exchange cheap T-shirts/soft toys, probe for tickets to that evening's events, plan to talk after the show. Repeat with next developer. As a lowly developer I do not presume to question the corporate strategies of the big publishers, but you have to wonder about the effectiveness of the millions spent on several tons of plastic sculptures, video walls, padded costumes, and booth babes. All very stimulating, I'm sure, and it all makes great press, but aside from having everyone in the same place at the same time (which is good for the likes of Brain In A Jar), what purpose does it actually serve?

Anyway, I digress. In order to make good the seemingly positive progress at E3 the following weeks were hectic. There were publishers to chase, designs to flesh out, and demos to tweak. We had set ourselves a two-week deadline for following up everyone who had expressed an interest in our concepts and technology, partly to prevent the Jekyll and Hyde post-show transformation of publishers, and partly to get things moving as quickly as possible. Publishers can be lumbering, slow-working beasts, and time is not a commodity Brain In A Jar has a lot of at the moment.

Our plan was quite straightforward: we had to turn our ideas, concept documents, and demos into a solid development strategy that could withstand critical scrutiny. Pretty graphics and great ideas can serve you well on the tradeshow floors, but afterwards you have to prove you can take hundreds of thousands of pounds from a publisher's pocket and write a game capable of recuperating this advance and turning a tidy profit. We were confident in our ability to do this; the tricky bit was convincing a publisher we could deliver the goods, especially in the current cash-strapped climate where publishers are increasingly wary of taking any sort of risks.

Our plan was simple: we had to turn our ideas, concept documents, and demos into a solid development strategy that could withstand critical scrutiny

The project-planning bit was straightforward; we already subscribe to the mantra of the five 'P's (Prior Planning Prevents Piss Poor Performance), as experience has taught many of us that deviation from this inevitably leads to disaster. Likewise, demo work proceeded apace, we knew what the various publishers wanted to see, and our engine is flexible enough to implement new features relatively swiftly.

The biggest problem I had was in having to approach our major game concept all over again. As a designer, I'd obviously thought long and hard about it, but second time around – and returning to it after time spent on other things – I began to see some of the flaws. To a casual reader of the design these flaws would often be seemingly insignificant or non-existent niggles. But to a designer who's written, and constantly rewritten, numerous iterations of the concept, they can seem to be disastrous and insurmountable problems. I found that getting others to put a fresh spin on the concept was the only way to iron out these sorts of issues. From a simple design overview document other people can have a radically different perspective on your grand vision, and it pays great dividends to heed these views. A designer cannot afford to be a prima donna, and I strongly believe that a designer's role is to filter other people's ideas just as much as it is to generate them. This process allowed me to overcome a number of worries I had with our concept and put together a pitch document ready to accompany our demo, budgets, and schedules.

Thus armed, we were ready to chase up our E3 contacts. As usual, the hit rate for genuinely interested parties was quite low, and often we found that the greenlighted projects we had been offered at E3 were already pretty much signed off to other developers, while others were already in development, and we had been used as pawns in someone else's corporate politics. Some publishers had completely got the wrong end of the stick, while others just weren't interested in what we had to offer. There's definitely something in the E3 water.

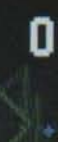
Fortunately, besides all this crap there was also genuine interest in Brain In A Jar, and now – nearly a couple of months down the line from E3 – it's crunch time. The possibilities have been narrowed down, our budgets and schedules have been tightened and presented to those publishers who maintained an interest, and we're now kind of in limbo, waiting for phone calls and biting our nails. Hopefully by the next diary we should actually be signed up to a project, and we can actually give you a peek at what we are working on. Fingers crossed.

The making of…

Sonic The Hedgehog

Sonic has been a lot of things over the years: a cartoon, a Swatch watch, a McDonald's Happy Meal gift, pasta shapes, boxer shorts, even a gene. He's conquered the skies as a hot air balloon and travelled the F1 circuits at up to 200mph. **Edge** discusses his genesis with Sonic Team's Yuji Naka

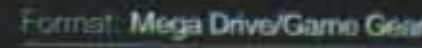
SCORE 0
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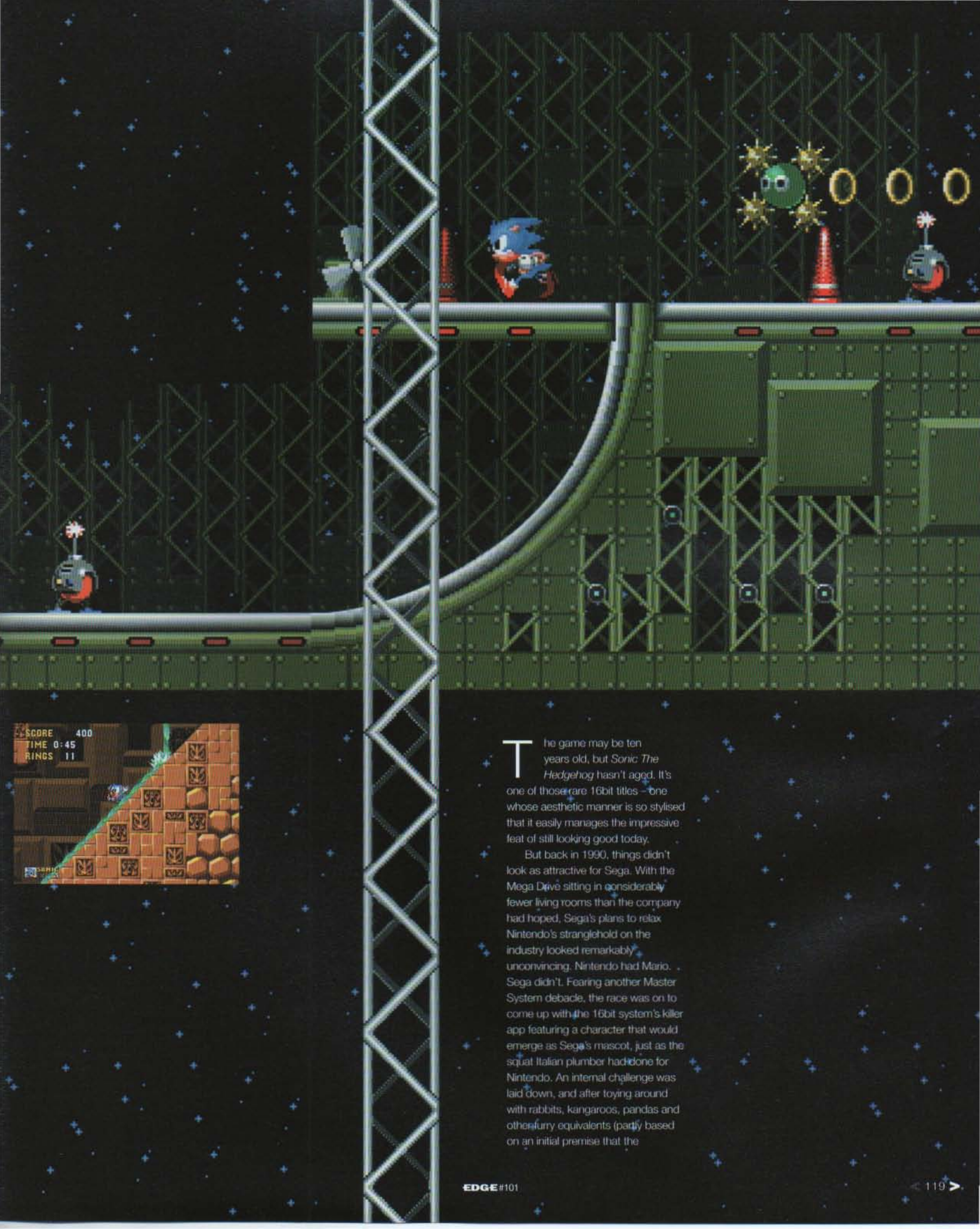








Format: **Mega Drive/Game Gear**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Sonic Team**
Origin: **Japan**
Original release date: **1991**



The game may be ten years old, but *Sonic The Hedgehog* hasn't aged. It's one of those rare 16bit titles – one whose aesthetic manner is so stylised that it easily manages the impressive feat of still looking good today.

But back in 1990, things didn't look as attractive for Sega. With the Mega Drive sitting in considerably fewer living rooms than the company had hoped, Sega's plans to relax Nintendo's stranglehold on the industry looked remarkably unconvincing. Nintendo had Mario. Sega didn't. Fearing another Master System debacle, the race was on to come up with the 16bit system's killer app featuring a character that would emerge as Sega's mascot, just as the squat Italian plumber had done for Nintendo. An internal challenge was laid down, and after toying around with rabbits, kangaroos, pandas and other furry equivalents (partly based on an initial premise that the









Green Hill (above) still retains a magical quality (and is also in *Sonic Adventure 2*). The 'technically impossible' rotating bonus round (right, centre)

"I really thought the game would be a hit – it had the potential. But I would not have thought for a single minute that it would be so successful"







character in question should, above anything else, be able to jump), the company focused on two contenders – an armadillo and hedgehog – before dismissing the former in favour of artist Masato Oshima's sketch of a blue spiky Erinaceus (presumably) europaeus. It helped that Sega also liked the way the word 'hedgehog' sounded in English. It was then up to **Yuji Naka** and his team to come up with the goods.

Naka-san had grown up playing Shigeru Miyamoto's games. He understood the need for simplicity of control amid what could often develop into a chaotic environment for a game character – the ability to make matters as intuitive as possible did not escape him. Hence the decision that Sonic would only require the D-pad and a button to move around the screen was a swift one. And Sonic himself was no slouch, either, of course.

"I thought about a game which would differ from *Mario* with a great action flavour," Naka-san says of the hedgehog's pace before going on to cite the ability to traverse hilly stages at high speed as the game's main










technical achievement. But in terms of development, the team had bigger mounds to climb.

"I wanted Sonic to be able to offer a good balance between technology and gameplay," divulges Naka-san. "So I had to think of the character in this light, and we proceeded with technology test and gameplay design. That cost lots of time, more than half a year.

"In order to exploit the hardware's power we had to try many things, many tricks. We were very passionate about showing what the machine was capable of. Maybe it's because I was programming myself, but I was also interested in seeing what the other programmers would be able to do with the hardware. Sonic was delivering [the kind of] high speed no other [game] was capable of, and the Mega Drive allowed this stunning demonstration of rotation during the bonus stages. This was said to be impossible on the hardware at the time."

But *Sonic The Hedgehog* was more than a seemingly unattainable technical achievement. Released on June 23, 1991, it represented a sweepingly absorbing prospect, full of quirky aspects and hugely popular innovative touches.

"I really thought the game would be a hit – it had the potential," recalls Naka-san. "But I would not have thought for a single minute it would be so successful. I think this success is one the reasons Sega became a major player."

Indeed. The decision by Sega of America to bundle the game with the Genesis (replacing the nonsense that was *Altered Beast* – early Genesis adopters were even offered the chance to send off for a free copy of Sonic to ensure fairness) kickstarted the company's comprehensive assault on the US videogame market, which Sega would subsequently go on to dominate. After some four million units were purchased, and to the delight of its parent company, the inevitable happened: Sonic evolved beyond the boundaries of its gaming origin, becoming a marketing team's dream. The little spiky blue creature with the big red trainers became a household name, with children the world over badgering their parents to buy them the latest Sonic merchandise.



Since 1991, some 29 *Sonic*-related titles have been released across a variety of formats (including Mega Drive, Game Gear, Mega CD, Pico, 32X, coin-op, Saturn, PC, and DC)

"I have been greatly pleased by the letters and emails I've received from fans. Particularly, I have been very happy with great drawings I've received from children overseas. The drawings feature new character ideas for future *Sonic* [games], and there were these mentions saying that I have the permission to use these characters," reveals the Sonic Team CEO.

Sonic The Hedgehog helped Sega regain its commercial feet. The money-spinning accomplishments of the character outside of game may have been shamelessly milked, but it deserves to be remembered as a striking technical and creative 16bit achievement. Besides, it's been more than just lunchboxes, Y-fronts, and duvet covers.

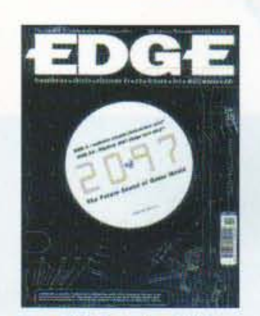
"As a great F1 fan, I was very happy to have Sonic on the [1993] Williams cars and on [Alain] Prost's helmet," says Naka-san. Not bad for a creature that spends most of its time in the wild covered in lice.

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 38, November 1996

November '96 found **Edge**'s long-burning dance fetish really hitting its stride. A new wave in synergy between sound and game was promised. 'Videogames and music have now officially met, shaken hands, and declared their respect for each other', ran the introduction to the cover feature, a relationship which now appears to have degenerated into bitching, guilty glances, and arguments about whose turn it is with the Robbie Williams album.

It wasn't all sonic. Trip Hawkins excused his way around the 3DO's failure and expressed preacher confidence in the fast-vaporising M2. Meanwhile, over in Testscreen, *Quake* managed to excite one reviewer just a little too much. Mentioning premature ejaculation within the first paragraph is one thing, but going on to use the onanistic 'spunking every round you've got into an empty room' is quite another.

Finally, the NuMedia section, still resplendent in lovely turquoise fifth colour reflect-o-rama, looked at a hi-fi system, some Simpsons cartoon software, and an eco-techno compilation called 'EarthTrance'. Well, what did you expect? Videogames?



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"The consumer will ultimately prove is that 32bit wasn't different enough, wasn't better enough, and wasn't cheap enough to be a big product category all by itself." **Trip Hawkins** on PlayStation

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

'Trip Hawkins remains one of the games industry's brightest sparks. He's an illuminating visionary, a brilliant marketer, a shrewd businessman, and a complete pain in the arse.'

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Fighting Vipers (Saturn; 8/10), *Wipeout 2097* (PS; 8/10), *Quake* (PC; 9/10), *Metal Slug* (Neo-Geo CD; 6/10), *Street Fighter Zero 2* (PS; 8/10), *Syndicate Wars* (PC; 9/10)



1



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4



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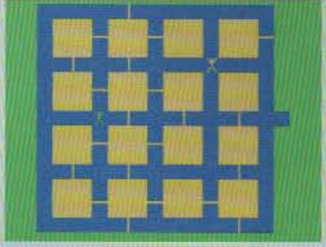
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1. The Saturn version of *Space Harrier*: 'Not likely to make Breton, Bunuel and Dali rise from the grave' 2. Sega's carnival float, apparently 'pumping out hardstep jungle' 3. Virtual Idol, Kyoke Date 4. Would you buy a next-generation console from this man? 5. An **Edge** reviewer shoots his load 6. Ellipsoids: still the new polygons, according to **Edge**'s look at *Ecstatica 2*

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, TV's **Iain Lee** recalls happy days trapped in *Alcatraz* with nothing but a Dragon 32 for company





You always hurt the one you love – something *Alcatraz*'s hero is well aware of, thanks to Lee

When I was about nine years old, my dad brought home a strange-looking typewriter in a massive polystyrene box. This bitch was my Dragon 32, my first glimpse of how truly wonderful it was to be growing up in the '80s. It was also the first time I ever became addicted to a game. The game was *Alcatraz*, and it was a mindbending mix of hypnotic colours and a pounding beat that all added to an amazing sense of fear and paranoia. The plot was beautifully simple: help your wrongly convicted prisoner escape from Alcatraz.

To unlock the doors, you simply had to wave at a passing guard, who would chase after you and, in his rage, leave doors open. I think it was these little realistic touches that did it for me. Of course the guard is going to leave the door open, dummy, he's busy chasing a fugitive!

The thing about a lot of these old games is that they are so bloody hard. In the three years that I enjoyed *Alcatraz*, I never progressed beyond level three. That sounds like a ridiculous – some may say, sad – amount of time to stay loyal to one game, but I really cared for that guy. And thanks to my failings, he never managed to escape.

FAQ

Martyn Chudley

MD, Bizarre Creations

Martyn Chudley can often be seen hunched over a keyboard alongside his crew, currently 'updating' *MSR* for XBox and working on two prototypes – *Space Munky* and *Smokescreen*.

What was the first videogame you played?
I think it was probably *Combat* on the Atari 2600.

What was the first game machine you owned?
A Binatone *Pong*-type machine – it was one of those orange ones, if anyone else can remember back that far.

What was the first thing you ever created?
A sprite editor on the C64 in the mid-'80s.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
Other than trying to sell a C64 macro assembler that I'd written, it's only really been this. I started up the company which has ultimately become Bizarre Creations in 1987 when I left school, so other than this, I've never really done anything else in the industry. The first full game that I created back then was a platform shooter called *Combat Crazy* on the Commodore 64, which sold a massive 1,000 units.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
Without going back to the rose-tinted specs of the early days, I think it would have to be *Banjo-Kazooie* on the N64. It's enjoyable, addictive, looks good, and is simple, yet deep.

What was the last game you played?
Spyro 3, which was fantastic. There are very few games that have got the hook to hold your attention long enough to complete everything in the game 100 per cent, but this is one of them.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
It all depends on what's out at the time or how busy we are at Bizarre. Sometimes it's only a few hours, but if there's a game I'm really enjoying, it gets played morning, evening and weekends – perhaps 20-plus hours or so.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
Currently *Ferrari 355*.

What's your favourite book, album, and film?
Book: 'Lord Of The Rings'. Album: Pink Floyd, 'The Wall'. Film: 'Aliens'. Wow, I'm showing my age there.

Which Web site do you most regularly visit?
Unlike most of the programmers here (whose sites you'd not be able to print due to decency laws) I most frequently visit Vintage Gaming (www.vg-network.com) and www.arsenal-world.net.

What game would you most like to have worked on?
F355. It's awesome.

Of all the games you've been involved in in the past, what's your favourite, and why?
Formula 1 on PlayStation, without a doubt. I love the sport, and enjoyed writing the game and the critical acclaim it received – and it was also the first game that we all worked on together as Bizarre Creations.

What stage is your current project at?
We've got three projects on the go here at the moment. *Project Gotham* for Microsoft is reaching crunch time – we're finishing off the code and art, before we reach the intensive polishing and bug-fixing stage. The *Space Munky* team are a couple of months into their new project – having done all the early design work, they're now on to a prototype. And the *Smokescreen* team are currently finalising the plans for their next project.

Which aspects do you think will impress players the most?
In *Gotham*, I hope it will be the progression and focussing of the kudos system, as we've been working really hard to rework this part of the game based on the great feedback we've had from the Internet and Microsoft's product testing program. *Space Munky* – probably the bananas. And *Smokescreen*, I'd say the smoky screens.

"Publishers are now extremely reluctant to lend marketing or development support to games that don't fit into a neat category"

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
A new compiler that writes and debugs the code for you.

What disappoints you about the industry?



The fact that games now have to be pigeonholed. Publishers are now extremely reluctant to lend marketing or development support to games that don't fit into a nice, neat category. No one seems to want to take even the smallest of risks any more. So if you're developing anything other than a neatly categorised racing/platform/sports/action/sim/FPS, then you're going to have a hard time getting marketing folks to take it seriously.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
The long hours, lack of sleep and social life, smell of the office during stressful periods, or the constant supply of pizza. Or perhaps it's seeing your games on the shelf, watching someone buy a copy, hearing nice comments from people playing it, or getting emails thanking the team for developing a great game.

Whose work do you most admire?
The usual culprits, I'm afraid. As an individual, Miyamoto. As a company, Rare – we want to be just like them when we grow up.

What new gaming platform are you most looking forward to?
GBA2. Not that I'm tired of the first one yet.

What are your thoughts on mobile phone gaming?
I'm not that keen on the idea at the moment, as there are some big problems that will need to be overcome first. Do you want a phone the size of a GBA, or a GBA the size of a phone?

inbox

Communicate by post:
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Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

For the umpteenth time in **Edge**'s pages, I find that what I had at first taken to be N64 screenshots turn out to be from PS2. Jaggies, low-polygon models and blurry textures – these have become the dubious province of Sony's next-gen machine. Now Sony has released *GT3*, the title which will at last demonstrate what the machine can really do when properly understood. For an hour in the computer shop I stare in dismay at *GT3*'s noticeable pop-up, its cardboard scenery, the few, bland textures stretched apologetically like butter over too much bread. I know **Edge** is tired of hearing this, but the publicity regarding *GT3* and the console on which it runs has reached Orwellian proportions. *GT3*, supposedly a showcase for the 'power' of PS2, is actually a conclusive demonstration of its limitations. One year after its Japanese release and PS2 is already being pushed further than it can go. Which makes the statements of Ken Kutaragi and Phil Harrison all the more insulting as they dismiss **Edge**'s legitimate concerns and assure us that the emperor's gown is spun from the finest invisible cloth. Well, I have seen most of the games available for their machine and am in a position to make a statement of my own: a console which is claimed to be next-gen and yet suffers from flickering, jaggies, poor textures, pop-up and slowdown is a console that was released only half-finished. My hope is that Sony will quickly abandon this shambles and move on to PS3 as soon as possible, thereby erasing the embarrassing spectacle of a last-gen prototype masquerading as a 128bit console.
Jack O'Driscoll, via email

I am sick and tired of people bitching about the lack of quality games on the PS2. I have five games (*TimeSplitters*, *ZOE*, *Oni*, *SSX*, and *Tekken Tag Tournament*) and think they're more than just 'average' titles. The media (including yourself) and gaming public who say such things are talking nonsense. Sometimes I wonder if they've even played the games they criticise. Take your review of *TimeSplitters*, for example: you said that the game doesn't focus on oneplayer gaming (**E**91, p96). This is where you go wrong with your review because if you played the game you would know that it only gives you half of the level if playing story mode on normal difficulty. Can you justify your reason for not telling me this in your review?
JonPaul Mackin, via email
That's two sides of the coin, which puts to rest any more letters regarding PS2 game quality on these pages. No more, please. (Regarding *TimeSplitters*, even Free Radical Design would admit that it's not a oneplayer-focused game.)

Why the hell is the Xbox so big? Everything technology-wise is getting smaller, right? So why the hell is the Xbox built like a brick shithouse?

I have heard that size does matter. But certainly in the world of videogames, big numbers mean more power speed and polygons per second – but physical proportions are a different matter. Fact is, volume-wise, Xbox is nearly twice the size of PS2 and almost three times that of Gamecube. So if you intend to buy one you'd best start knocking through an extension to your bedroom.

Sony can built VAIO laptops as thin as exercise books, so why can Microsoft only manage something a tad smaller than a barbecue? Is it jam packed with gadgetry or just full of hot air?
Matt Cox, Manchester
There'll be an awful lot of, if not hot, then at least considerably warm air circulating within Bill's baby.

I'd consider myself a reasonably informed gamer, and thus surprised at the prevailing post-E3 opinions suggesting that Nintendo is regarded as the company of choice for the informed, while Sony and MS are for the so-called uninformed majority.

This seems to have resulted in a certain level of hypocrisy in **Edge** and many others. Consider the previews of *Rogue Squadron* and *Jak & Daxter*. Now, *Rogue Squadron* seems to be a basic retread of the same formula as many other 'Star Wars' games, particularly the first *Rogue Squadron*. Only the graphics are improved. But yet there's no mention of this lack of originality. As for *J&D*, the game has pretty much been universally condemned for its generic elements, despite it having a similar level of graphical quality. These are just two examples of many.

Seemingly, if a game is published by Sony or MS, gamers will always point to the lack of originality. It's often said how much the PS2 relies on sequels. But yet they seem happy to play the thousandth *Mario*, *Zelda*, etc. These rarely seem to move beyond the expected improvements, such as *Zelda 64*. Was I the only one who found no new and interesting elements? Consider *Pikmin*. If this was on a PC, it wouldn't be looked at twice. Yet the name Miyamoto seems to cause amnesia amongst the 'informed'. Consider *Pokémon*. If this endless series had occurred on Sony's format, it would be derided far more than it is now.
Neuro Splicer, via email
You're accusing **Edge** of bias, right? Fair enough. It's a fair cop. This is the most biased magazine you'll ever read. Biased, biased, biased. Towards quality electronic entertainment.



Neuro Splicer damns journalism which dares to criticise *Jak & Daxter*'s perceived unoriginality, claiming it wouldn't happen to a Nintendo title



Dennis Mons applauds the existence of Nintendo's WaveBird GameCube controller, but isn't happy that it doesn't come as standard

I just thought I would write to say how much I enjoyed Toshihiro Nagoshi's analogy of videogame platform appeal in **E**99's AV Out – I thought it was very amusing. On a more serious note, though, I thought he might like to know that after breaking up with him, she started going out with me. After a short but wild and wonderful time, however, her parents forbade her from continuing her relationship with me. Although I must admit to still loving her dearly, I hate her parents and will never forgive them for what they did to us. I also heard that they did the same with her younger sister, although personally I did not go out with her. What sort of parents are they? Unforgivable.

Alex Harrington, via email

Apparently her parents have sharpened up their act of late, though. Give them another chance.

Tom raised some very valid points (in **E**99) about whether we really want the games industry to become 'mainstream-ised'. But is this prophecy really the doomsday we are all expecting? We are assuming that most of the public who 'do not play games yet' are going to be the most casual of gamers. Who's to say a significant slice of these misfits who get introduced to games via a mainstream product may actually decide they like games a lot and become hardcore gamers?

Whatever the outcome, there will always be a market for creative and innovative games as long as there are gamers like us about. Do you think creative outfits such as Lionhead and even Nintendo will resort to producing massmarket drivel? The automotive industry provides the simplest analogy: most of the public who just want a car to get from A to B will buy a Vauxhall Astra or a Citroën Saxo. Those who want more from their car will (if they can afford it) purchase a Porsche or the like. The Ferraris and Aston Martins still exist, even though most of us drive around in Mondeos.

Maybe the way forward would be to have price categories based on the game's development time, the more creative game demanding a higher premium. Another issue to consider regarding the entertainment industry is the level of increase in awareness. Most films that flop at the box office do so because word of mouth dooms it to failure. A lot more people watch films, so there are a lot more critics and media attention that goes with it. If this situation happened in the games industry, the level of poor-quality or very derivative games would hopefully be controlled.

Matt Brady, via email

Edge isn't read by significantly more people than it was 80 or 90 issues ago, which suggests that people who've discovered videogames only recently have no wish to become especially committed to them.

After reaching the 'Prophet Forecast' article in **E**100, I was inspired to finally write in, which was because I happen to be something of a gaming prophet myself. I foresaw the end of Sega and their new direction, and bored everyone telling them about it, so here are some of the other predictions my friends don't want to hear about.

GameCube will last about as long as the Dreamcast. Its failings will be the same as those of the N64. Sega and Nintendo will merge into one big softco, and they will later release a new console to compete with PS4, but more on this later. Microsoft's Trojan horse (Xbox) will have succeeded in converting the PSX generation into Microsoft junkies. Xbox2 will be released as a PC add-on, as everyone will have a PC already as part of government schemes to educate the masses. Broadband gaming will prove a huge success, but short lived, as the public has become disillusioned with games that they can't complete, hi-scores that they can't beat because of cheaters, and an all-round shallow gaming experience – and revert to retrogaming.

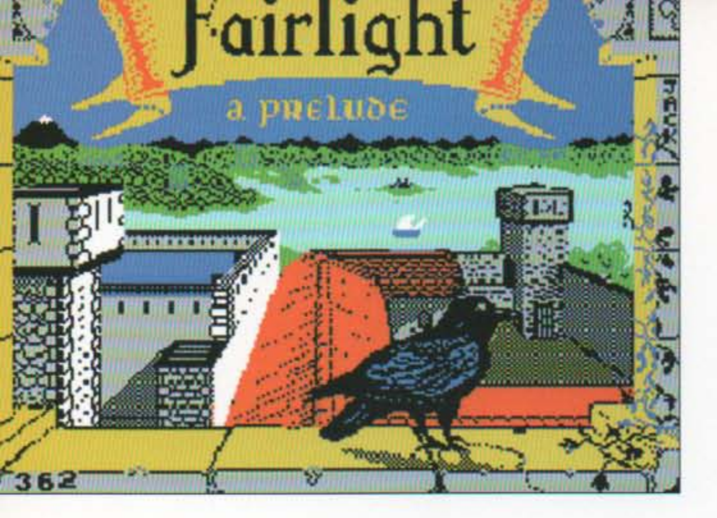
Sony release the PSX Pocket to take advantage of the retrogaming trend. Later the Sega/Nintendo conglomerate will release a superconsole capable of playing any game from Master System through to GameCube. Indie developers start making new games for the retro platforms and have huge success. With Microsoft holding the market share for new games on the Xbox2 and Sega/Nintendo having relived success with their old hardware, Sony are left in no man's land.

Gaz Langston, via email

Here is a public shout out for all console- and peripheral-producing companies: in these wonderful times, in which it is possible to put people on the moon, even consider them bringing them to Mars; in these times in which Levi's makes 501s with MP3 players; in these times where TV sets are flatter than a pack of cigs; in these times in which Blue Tooth can (theoretically) make it possible for a numerous amount of digital thingies to communicate with each other; in these times in which GSMs are made so ridiculously small that fingers don't even fit the dials; in these times in which 'they' can cram 64Mb of information in a piece of plastic no bigger than a fingernail; why, in the name of the Holiest of Holiest, won't console-producing companies for once concentrate on the 'wires' problem?

I own a lot of digital crap, including a Dolby

> 'Why the hell is the Xbox so big? Everything technology-wise is getting smaller, right? So why the hell is the Xbox built like a brick shithouse?'



Even ancient titles such as *Fairlight* gave accurate information on loading time, but many games now struggle. Anthony Newell can no longer abide it

Digital set, a high-end television, a projector, DVD player, a video recorder, and 12 consoles (four of them with four controllers). Do you have any idea what a mess of wires that makes in my 'AV-corner'? I'm getting fed up with that pile of spaghetti. Is it really that hard to make an audio-video connection with a television without the use of wires? Is it really that difficult to have controllers without a wire so you can sit anywhere in the room without the use of extension cables? Sure, Nintendo has showed off a wireless controller, but is it standard? No, of course not – 'It's a peripheral you have to buy separately, but it'll only cost you £30'. Come on, folks.

Basically, there's only a real need for a cord for AC (could be quite messy if you have 220V floating around your living room). So, instead of concentrating on modems and console sizes, etc, please, please try and come up with a good idea for all the wires. I feel like I'm living 'backstage' somewhere (not to mention the frowns of my girlfriend when I bring in another electrical appliance).

Dennis Mons, via email

You big show-off, you.

E99's testscreen rightly addressed some of the many problems of the loading screen, a fundamental, and – in my opinion – the most enjoyable part of any videogame. However, what has turned me into the bitter 20-year-old that I am today is not the fact that no one ever really appreciated the wonders of the Mega-CD, but instead that no one's getting those damn loading bars right, a fact **Edge** failed to mention.

What really gets my metaphorical goat is that at its purest a loading bar should scroll in a smooth and uniform manner from the left part of the screen until it reaches the end of the bar on the right, hence accurately informing the player of the time left until the game's start. Lamentably, this hardly ever happens nowadays, and we've been accosted with bars that stutter their way along, never get to the end, or even bounce their way back for a second go, essentially defying their own purpose.

Major offenders include popular brands such as the *Tomb Raider* series, despite its excellent colour-changing techniques, the two *Tony Hawk* outings, and almost every single *FIFA* on CD. Naturally on a PC this kind of behaviour can be to some extent excused, owing to the vast number of different specs and possible bottlenecks, but on consoles it's simply inexcusable. Softcos should have the courtesy to time the amount of time it takes to load whatever particular element of the game is in question and scroll the bar in accordance.

Although this may seem risible at first glance, this simply cannot be ignored any more, especially when one looks at the statistics. The average gamer conservatively plays around an hour a day, a good three minutes of which may be spent watching the progress bar. Over the course of a lifetime (some 50 years considering the lack of healthy looking gamers these days) this may amount to a shocking 40 days of one's life anticipating a game's load. This figure is even more likely to increase considering the increasing size of today's games coupled with the definite move away from solid-state media.

I therefore implore **Edge** to dedicate at least a small box of every review to explaining the virtues and vices of a game's loading bar. I am but one of many who share these feelings, as the huge swarm of mail in favour of this move will surely prove.

Anthony Newall, via email

Shocking offenders will be noted from now on.

> 'Instead of concentrating on modems and console sizes, etc, manufacturers should come up with a good idea for all the wires. I feel live I'm living 'backstage' somewhere'

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet

Topic: **Over- and underrated games**
Poster: **welsh**
[On *Tempest 3000*] The levels that take place on a (pseudo?) cylinder are a kind of discretized polar (radius,angle) system, and so on. *hairline recedes visibly*

Topic: **Why can't an aspiring game designer get a break?**
Poster: **Dominic Bunnell**
If I had complete control over a development team of say 15 for a couple of months then I could make a game many times better than anything Miyamoto has ever done.

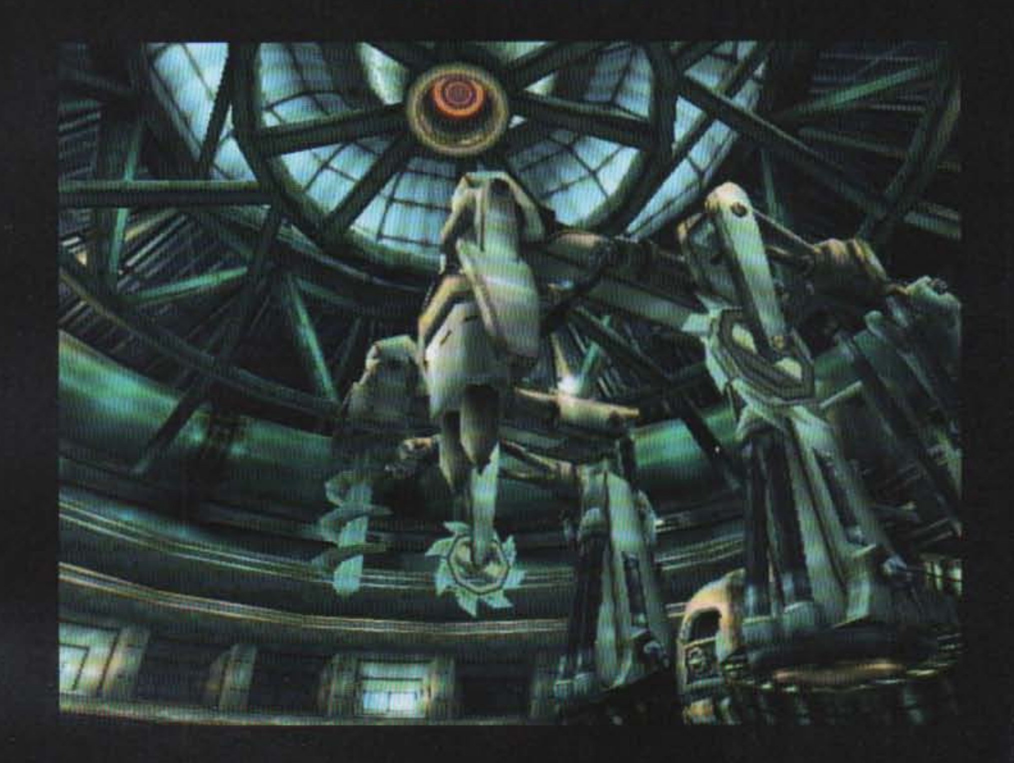
Topic: **Absolute mastery**
Poster: **Nick_F**
Your puny *Tetris* scores amuse me. I have a record of 783 lines in *Tetris DX*.

Topic: **Absolute mastery**
Poster: **jcafarley**
I used to get people to watch me play Mario 64. I was so convinced I was the best ever at it that I claimed I could complete the entire first level using my feet. And I did.

Topic: **Absolute mastery**
Poster: **JoeK**
Renegade on the humble Speccy. I don't know how many thousands of dirty punks felt my knee in their groins but it was an awful lot.

Topic: **Absolute mastery**
Poster: **Dude Ranch**
Konami's *Yie Ar Kung Fu* on MSX. I used to get up at 6am on a Sunday and play non-stop – there was no pause button – until my lovely roast was on the table at around 2pm.

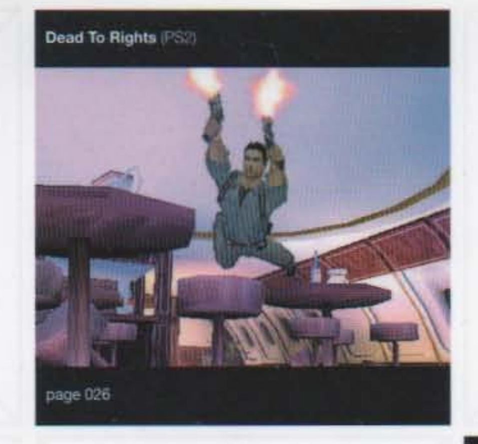
Next month



It's quiet now. It won't be in **E**102.
An(other) exclusive **Edge** preview

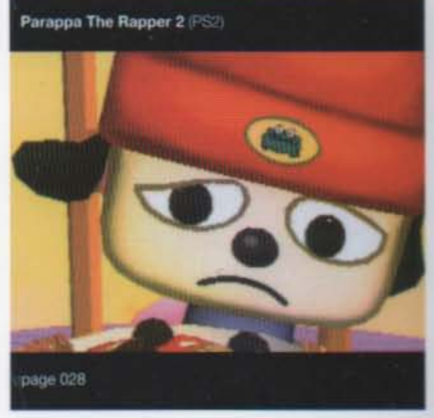


Dead To Rights (PS2)



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Parappa The Rapper 2 (PS2)



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Maelstrom (Xbox)



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Out Trigger (Dreamcast)



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